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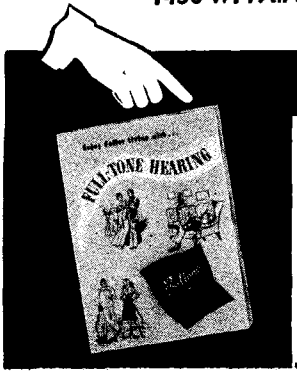

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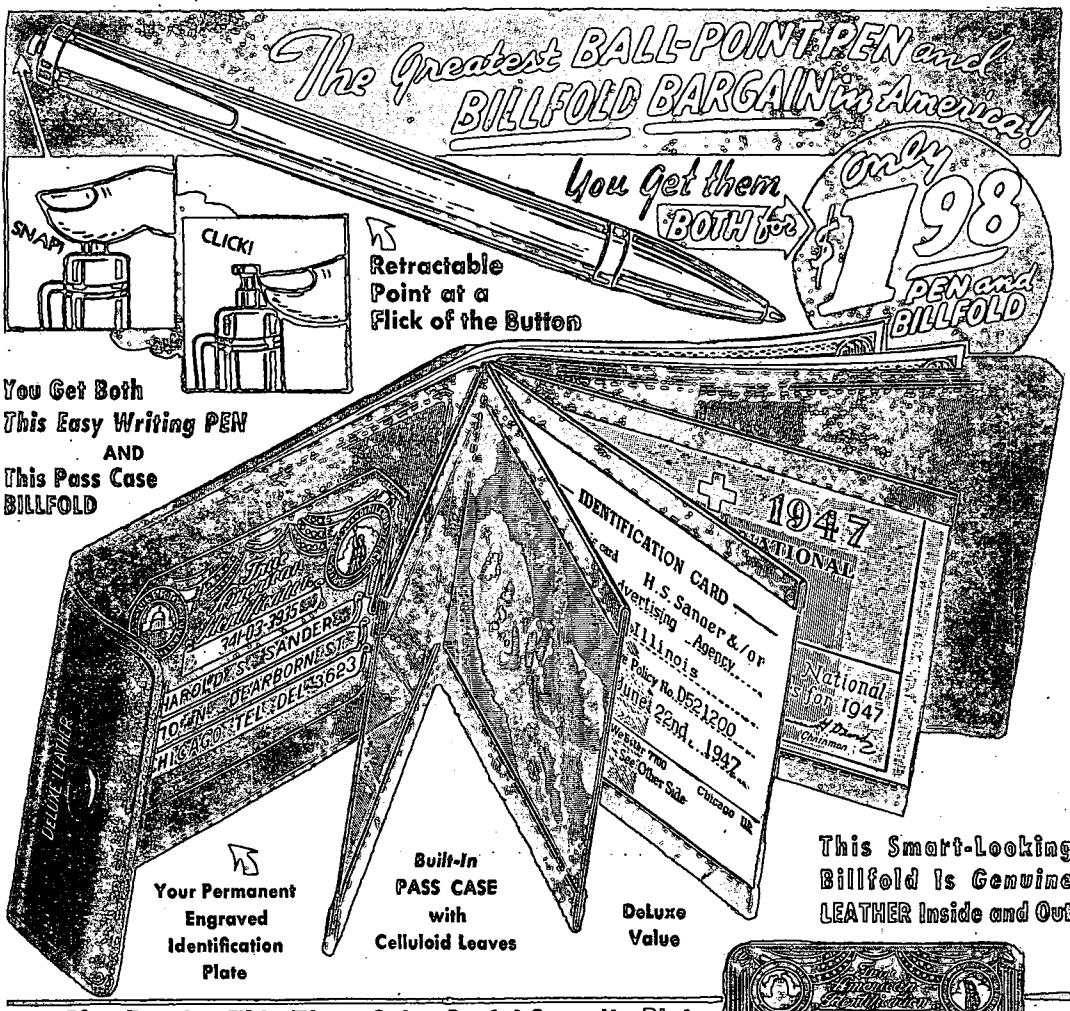

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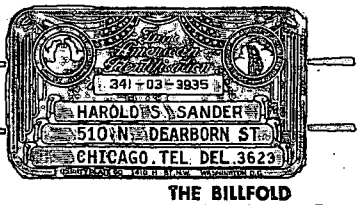

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Cover Painting by Earle Bergey—Illustrating "Through the Purple Cloud"

STARTLING STORIES, published every other month by Better Publications, Inc., N. L. Pines, President, at 4600 Diversey Ave., Chicago 39, Ill. Editorial and executive offices, 10 East 40th St., New York 16, N. Y. Entered as second class matter November 22, 1946, at the post office at Chicago, Illinois, under the act of March 3, 1879. Copyright, 1947, by Better Publications, Inc. Subscription (12 issues), $1.80; single copies, $.15; foreign and Canadian postage extra. In corresponding with this magazine please include your postal zone number, if any. Manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelopes and are submitted at the author's risk. Names of all characters used in stories and semi-fiction articles are fictitious. If the name of a living person or existing institution is used, it is a coincidence.

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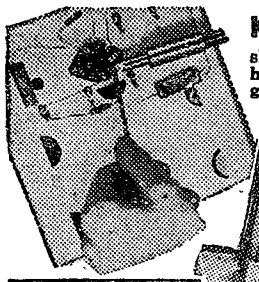

KIT 1 (left) I send you Soldering Equipment and Radio Parts; show you how to do Radio Soldering; how to mount and connect Radio parts; give you practical experience.

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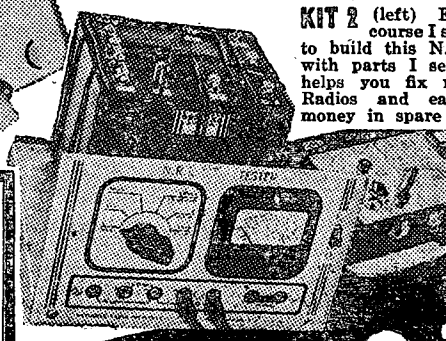

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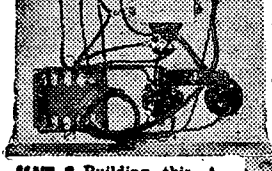

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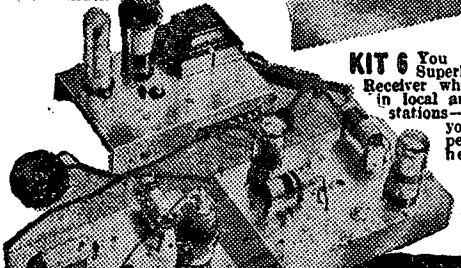

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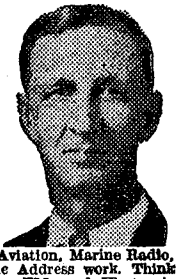

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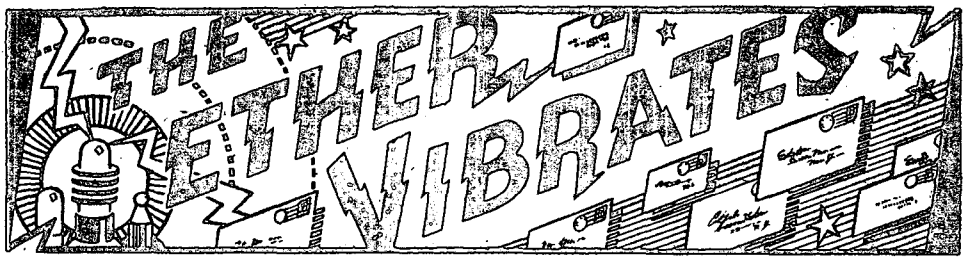

NOT long ago Quincy Howe, in a radio talk about current scientific advances, remarked that while scientists had bared the universal source of energy in splitting the atom, they had yet to discover the source of life. He implied and quite correctly that this would be the greatest of all scientific discoveries.

Well, science is going after it from a good many fronts.

Psychologists, working from nerve ends and skin structure on to the brain, represent one mode of attack on this most baffling mystery. But in general their approach is through reaction to stimulus of one kind or another and has a long way to go (and a considerable change in point of view to attain) before its students delve into the causes of such reaction.

The Seat of Life

It is highly improbable that the brain is the seat of life—its source must probably be found elsewhere. Psychologists for the most part merely attempt to show that the brain is merely an instrument of reaction rather than of a source of independent thought and will.

As such they are in direct opposition to virtually all religions which attempt to give man a soul beyond the mere tools of existence—yet religions have practised psychology for many thousands of years in their uses of mass inspiration and the confessional.

Pure scientists come closer perhaps than any others, including the nuclear physicists—though heaven only knows what the latter may turn up at any moment. In delving into solar energy they are getting awfully close to the elemental—where surely the source of life must lurk.

But your so-called "pure" scientist, having passed far beyond the certainties of finite mathematical formulae, becomes ultimately a philosopher—and philosophy is also approached through theological and physiological routes if followed to their ultimates.

So, like the gradual tying together of scientific formulae hitherto considered far apart as the poles—like the relations between electricity, gravity, light and other basic forces of the universe into various branches of a more or less finite whole—formerly opposed human credos of religion, philosophy and science are ever coming closer.

It is possible that certain men of certain religions, without the aid of what we call science today, have more closely approached at times the knowledge of what is life than have our most advanced laboratory and field technicians. Lacking the burden of scientific proof, it becomes a moot point for argument.

Faith is Essential

But what is evident is that there need be no fortified and jealously guarded boundary between the forces of science and faith—for without faith there can be neither science nor religion. Yet for some reason it takes a human of high personal caliber to understand this point—and few scientists or so-called "men of God" have such unbigoted intelligence.

Personally we have never been able to understand what makes such obvious truth so hard to accept. But we well remember a philosophy class at the great university we attended in which the instructors asked us, for the sake of following a theory, to suppose there were no God—at which several irate members of the class rose and insisted there *was* a God. And believe it or not they were serious.

Maybe the great discovery, when it comes, will clear up a lot of such dead wood. Something has to happen to increase the flexibility of average human belief without annihilating faith. If it doesn't we can expect some idiot to inflict destruction upon us with the noblest possible motives.

OUR NEXT ISSUE

THE novel with which we are starting off STARTLING STORIES for 1948 is THE BLUE FLAMINGO, by Hannes Bok. It is one of the most unusual and stirring and thought-

(Continued on page 8)

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THE ETHER VIBRATES

(Continued from page 6)

provoking tales that has come to our attention in a long time.

Briefly the story concerns a group of men who break out of a Florida prison and hide out in the swamps with the feminine consort of one of their number as guide. They are a quarrelsome quartet of highly varied capabilities, none of them prepared for what they discover deep in the Everglades.

What they come upon may well have been the fountain of youth for which the late Ponce de Leon hunted in vain. It is apparently a stone stairway inside a moss-grown ruin—but upon reaching its top they find the blue flamingo and another stairway, which leads to a tangential world of strange dimensional forms and even stranger effect upon its visitors.

This is a story of magic and mystery and scientific marvel which should cause most of its readers to ponder upon its conclusions long after they have laid it down. And it is written by a master of pseudo science and fantasy who has long rated close to the top of the field. THE BLUE FLAMINGO will increase his stature still more.

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(Continued on page 94)

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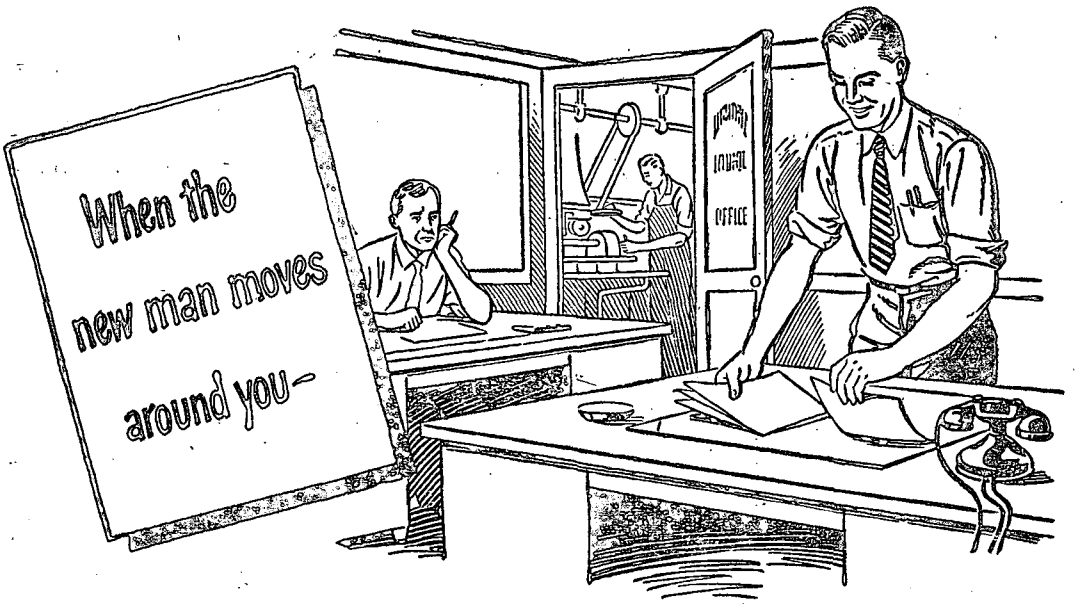

You remember the day Charlie Fisher started in Factory Office. You remember his early weeks when *you* "broke him in." Today he's clearing off the old desk and moving into a job ahead of yours. You've been ten years longer with the company and you can't understand it.

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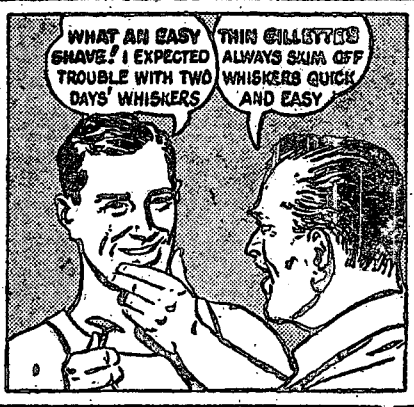

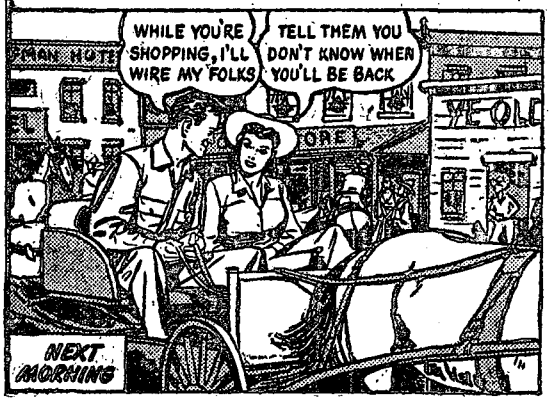

YOUR FACE LOOKS WELL GROOMED AND FEELS SWELL AFTER A SMOOTH, REFRESHING THIN GILLETTE SHAVE. MEN, THIS BLADE IS THE KEENEST AND LONGEST LASTING LOW-PRICED BLADE YOU EVER TRIED. THEN, TOO, IT FITS YOUR GILLETTE RAZOR ACCURATELY AND THUS PROTECTS YOU FROM THE IRRITATION CAUSED BY MISFIT BLADES. ASK FOR THIN GILLETTES
THIN Gillette BLADES
4 for 10

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Jim Hunt talked with Sally in the moonlight (CHAPTER III)

THE MAN IN THE IRON CAP

By MURRAY LEINSTER

An indescribable and horrible group of invaders from space had held the world in thrall — and one man, a discredited scientist, stood alone in a last-ditch defense of humanity!

CHAPTER I

Drop Into Darkness

THE space-craft landed. Silently. Gently, in deep forest. Within it there was venom and dissension—silent venom, soundless dissension, thoughts. Only thoughts—a thought of bitter reproach—for gluttony. A thought of furious defensiveness. Angry, soundless accusations and counter-accusations. Then a cold, hard thought, reporting fact.

The air outside the ship was good and the temperature bearable. There would be animals. Because of this—the thought was icily savage and meant gluttony—they would have to move of themselves, rather than be carried as was more convenient.

But half a dozen of them should be able to

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handle any single animals on a strange world. There must be, though, not—again the savage thought of gluttony—until they had learned the nature of life on this world. Until they had some idea of its more intelligent and useful forms.

The craft that had landed was not large. Where it rested amid huge forest patriarchs the branches had swerved aside and closed above it. It was hidden from above. But speckles of moonlight penetrated the leaves. They showed, presently, a circular slab in the ship's side in the act of unscrewing. It was a door.

The moonlight shone upon movement—upon movements—upon creatures in awkward, unaccustomed self-locomotion. They were very small compared to men and their appearance was extremely improbable. They hobbled painfully in a compact group.

At first they did not communicate even with each other, as if they strained whatever senses they possessed in the effort to savor the nature of this strange planet. Then the thoughts began. They expressed disgust—disdain.

Then came the icy cold clear thought that here the ground was firm and the vegetation worn away, as if by the passage of many animals.

They hobbled along the path. Presently there was a light, an artificial light. There was tumultuous interchange of thought at ground level among the struggling, painfully un-adept pedestrians. They moved forward.

A dog barked furiously and rushed at them.

The small creatures stood still. The dog slowed, and stopped, then curled up and lay snoring on the ground. The improbable things inspected him. There was fury in the thought-exchanges. But the icy factual thought came again. This creature's paws were not adapted to the making of artifacts such as the building yonder, nor the handling of tools required to make artificial lights. So they should examine the building.

THE tiny, loathesome creatures hobbled painfully toward it. Presently. . . .

Men carried them back to the craft in which they had come. The men walked with the curious gait of sleep-walkers. And when the men had gone away again the craft that had landed in the forest was filled with rejoicing. It was silent rejoicing, soundless glee—glee which rose to the status of rebellion. Mutiny took place, with every member of the crew a mutineer and joyously resolved to remain upon this planet for always.

The icy factual thought recurred again. No gluttony—not yet. The intelligent life on this planet was highly-developed. Alarmed, it might be dangerous. But if the whole thing were carefully planned and properly carried out. . . .

The guard's flashlight played on Jim Hunt for a bare instant before he let go and fell like a stone into the blackness under the dirigible. He felt a raging triumph even as the ship's huge elongated form shrank swiftly and was blotted out against the stars.

The light had played on him at just the right instant and from just the right angle. The guard would swear that he'd been empty-handed—that he'd jumped to his death from the Security patrol-ship *Cinquoin,* in the darkness and at fifteen thousand feet, rather than submit to recapture. And that was what Jim Hunt wanted.

But the odds were great that the guard would tell the exact truth. As he fell he had the seat-pack, to be sure. After breaking out of the prison cab he'd taken it from the crew's cabin of the ship in a desperate and stealthy foray down from the maze of braces and wires and billowing sluggish balloons within the framework of the monster airship.

But he'd allowed himself to be cornered and sighted up near the bow, as if he'd been trying in the ultimate of desperation to find some hiding-place in which to conceal himself against search. With honest testimony,

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now, that he'd leaped to his death unequipped, it might be that the theft of the seat-pack from the other end of the ship wouldn't be noticed.

It might be weeks or months before one seat-pack, emergency, type whatever-it-was, was missed and finally surveyed as expended or lost in the normal operations of the Security Patrol Ship *Cinquoin*. And by that time Jim Hunt would either be safely hidden —or it wouldn't matter.

FALLING with the mounting velocity of dropped stone and trying desperately to wriggle into the seat-pack's straps, he grew savagely sure that it wouldn't matter. He fell thirty-two feet the first second, sixty-four the second, ninety-six the third and a hundred and twenty-eight the fourth. He had one arm through one of the seat-straps but no more.

At the tenth second he had dropped two thousand feet and was falling at the rate of a mile every sixteen seconds. At the fifteenth second the wind screamed about him as he hurtled earthward. He found himself grimacing savagely, falling through space like a meteor.

The wind of his fall ran up the sleeve of his shirt and burst it. And he fought the wildly vibrating seat-pack, which trailed behind him. In a nightmare of perpetual falling and blackness he knotted his hand in the strap he could not adjust and heaved.

There was a violent jerk. The pilot-chute was out and tending to check his fall. Another jerk, more violent. The first descent-chute. Then, at two-second intervals, the four horrible wrenching heaves that were the others. Seat-packs, being designed for emergency use in the most literal possible sense of the term, do not contain one large parachute, but five small ones. They open successively, making five lesser wrenchings at a man's body instead of one overwhelming yank which could snap his neck.

Twenty-five seconds after his drop into sheer blackness from the Security ship Jim Hunt dangled below a swiftly-descending series of parachutes in the midst of a tangible darkness in which no star shone. He should, he believed, be over solid ground. But the *Cinquoin* might have made a detour for some unguessable reason, he might descend into icy black salt sea, or into a lake or even a pond which would serve as well to drown him as the ocean itself.

There was a faint, faint radiance above him. The *Cinquoin* was playing searchlights below. That was quick work, considering. Had he been able to adjust the seat-pack as quickly as its manufacturers claimed, his drop would have been checked a long way back.

The searchlight beams would have caught him above the cloud-bank which now hid him. Either the ship itself would have followed him to the ground or members of the Security Police would have jumped too, delaying the opening of their chutes so that they'd reach ground before him. Then he'd have been lost.

The radiance, dim at best, grew fainter still and died. The officers of the *Cinquoin* would have the honest statement of the guard that he'd simply jumped. The seat-pack had been hidden behind his body and he was considered rebellious enough and desperate enough to have committed suicide rather than live the rest of his life in Security Custody.

There was no sign of a chute beneath the ship. Everything pointed to his death. The odds were—and he neither saw nor heard anything to lessen them—that the ship had simply gone on to its destination, reporting him a suicide.

He dropped through darkness. Presently a sound like gentle surf upon a beach came up from below but it came from a wide area. It was a wind of some force, beating upon trees. He set his jaws. He had an excellent chance of being killed in this landing.

Or of losing his parachute-string when he struck—to be sighted from overhead when a routine patrol-plane search was made for his body. They wouldn't really expect to find it unless buzzards guided them but chutes caught in a tree-top would tell them entirely too much.

There was a sudden increase in the sound of wind-tossed branches. He smelled earth and woodland. He felt branches flashing past him in the dark. Something lashed him cruelly, like a cat-o'-nine-tails. He struck violently in a pine-tree, and rebounded—he thought he had broken some ribs—and fell in a great, arching swoop.

Suddenly he was drenched in a monstrous crashing of water all about him. Then, abruptly, the parachute-harness no longer tugged at him and he was knee-deep in a pond or stream, and the sound of wind among trees was a booming sound, inextricably

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mixed with the swishing of many leaves. And it was overhead.

He felt savagely triumphant. Jim Hunt was dead. The Security Police would concede it without question. The future would take care of itself. But somehow he'd show them! The fat-heads!

Security! Security! That was the watchword, now!

They said that science had gone too far. There were a dozen fields in which research might turn up instruments so deadly or principles capable of such monstrous applications that all research had to be supervised carefully.

So the World Government was formed—really to protect humanity against the consequences of its own intelligence.

Men were capable of such brilliance in dealing with the forces of the universe, and such stupidity in dealing with each other that mankind had to be protected against itself. But unfortunately the World Government confused the hopes of the future with the real dangers which menaced the safety of the present.

Jim Hunt had been solemnly adjudged a menace to the security of humanity. He'd been on his way to a Security Custody reservation to spend the rest of his life in confinement. He'd have been gently treated, to be sure, even allowed tools and the means of research if he chose—under constant, detailed supervision. But he was to be imprisoned for life.

NOW, though, he waded ashore in the darkness, pulling carefully on his parachute-lines. It took him a long time to get the billowing masses of cloth—some of it wetted—into a bundle that he could carry and ultimately hide.

He neither saw nor heard any signs of human life. But he moved cautiously into black forest, carrying the untidy bundle which had been the compact emergency-chute. He forced his way on at random until he realized that he might be moving in a circle.

Then he lay down to wait for dawn. He was not wholly at ease. If there was the least suspicion that he had escaped, Security would hunt him from aloft with infra-red scanners that could note the heat of his body from an incredible distance. There were so many things that could be done if his survival was suspected! And of course a man who was dangerous to Security would be hunted much more relentlessly than a mere murderer.

He could not sleep for a long time. Then he tried deliberately to relax. He would need all his strength and cunning presently. He willed his taut, tense muscles to relax. He made himself comfortable with parachute-silk under him on a bed of soft woods-mold, scraped together by groping fingers. He lay still and relaxed . . . relaxed . . . Presently he knew gratefully that in a little while he would sleep. . . .

Then there were little nibbling thoughts around the edge of his mind. Not his own thoughts—alien, patient, insinuating thoughts, thoughts that were not the product of his own brain.

"Nice . . ." said the thoughts. "Nice . . . Everything is nice . . . This is the nicest place in the world . . . Everyone is happy . . . This is nice. . . ."

JIM HUNT made a convulsive gesture and sprang to alertness there in the darkness in an unseen forest.

His hands clenched. His heart pounded horribly. Sweat poured out all over his body in streams.

He hadn't sweated like this even when he jumped from the dirigible in the hope that while falling he'd be able to work himself into the harness of an emergency parachute. His heart hadn't pounded at this tempo when he was about to land, swept at breakneck speed across the surface of a forest he couldn't see.

He was panting and his whole body turned cold from the sweat that had poured out over it. The forest was still, save for the booming sound of the wind overhead. Now that he was aroused and awake and panicky, it was hard to detect the thing that had stirred him so.

But he soothed himself by force of will. He waited and he was just barely able to feel the nibbling, soothing, insinuating ideas.

"Nice . . ." came the thought, persuasive but very faint. "This is nice . . . Everything is nice . . . Everything feels good . . . Sleep is good . . . Sleep is nice. . . ."

A murderous rage surged up in Jim Hunt's whole body. The nibbling thoughts faded abruptly.

He sat grimly with his back against a tree. His eyes burned in the blackness. When dawn broke his expression was grim and utterly formidable.

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CHAPTER II

Voices of the "Things"

SOME while after sunrise he found what might be termed a farmhouse—a log cabin, typical of mountain country, where erosion kept cleared land poor and not even cattle could be raised with any great profit. It was not large, and there were a sagging porch and wasteful rail fences and poverty-stricken outbuildings. From hiding Jim Hunt examined it keenly.

It was exquisitely ironic that he should have defied the Security Police and been sentenced to life Security custody because of his experimental work on the amplification and transmission of thought. He had dropped out of the sky in a thousand-to-one attempt at escape and run into those nibbling thoughts the night before. They were what he'd been given sentence for—transmitted thought.

Now he understood some of the Security Police testimony. It had been testified that, after an official admonishment not to continue a certain line of experiment, he had attempted to carry on his work in secret. They swore that detectors proved he had continued and that he had associates or confederates with whom he cooperated.

He knew that the testimony about the detectors was untrue because his work had been done in a cellar lined with quarter-inch plates of high-hysteresis iron. Nothing his apparatus produced could get through that! No detectors could have caught his fields outside that barrier!

So when Security Police gave evidence that he'd continued his work in secret, that was true enough. But when they swore that detectors showed his fields and that he had confederates in research, that wasn't true. He'd thought them liars.

Now he understood. Thought-fields weren't directional. He wasn't sure yet how they could spread out and concentrate again at a distance—and be present in between—and still give no indication of their point of origin.

But you couldn't locate a transmitter by

The Thing struggled desperately, encircled by the flames. (CHAPTER VI)

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any sort of direction-finding device. He knew that. And he knew fully that there was danger in the development of the transmission of thought. But he'd felt that there was greater danger in its non-development.

Those small, nibbling, insinuating thoughts were proof that he was right. Somebody else was using it for the one purpose that Security most feared—the implanting of beliefs and opinions in unsuspecting other persons.

And because it was happening, because Security had condemned him for studying the problem, because all worth-while research was now driven underground—why, Jim Hunt was filled at once with a murderous rage and a chilly panic. Everything he believed in was endangered.

Those small, sneaking thoughts on the very edge of sleep were not thoughts that the average person would recognize as alien, as directed, as not his own. They would seem to be his own thoughts. With skill any thoughts could be suggested.

He would believe this or believe that or believe that such-and-such was the case despite appearances. All his will and all his intelligence would be applied to the defense or realization of the ideas he believed his own.

Which was dangerous—which could be fatal. Even the Nazis, thirty years back, had had no such infallible system for the implanting of false ideas. It was that danger which had made the Security Laws forbid all experiment with amplified thought-transmission.

The law read:

An Act to amend an act . . . to amend an act entitled, 'An Act to Regulate and License Study and Research and Various Sciences' . . . Sec. IV. Part 3, Par. (c). 'The amplification of the physical factors involved in thought, awareness, perception, apperception, reason, knowledge, memory, or any of the phenomena included in human or animal consciousness is forbidden save in official Security experimental zones and under first-priority supervision. The violation of this provision shall be a first-degree offense against Security and may be punished by death or such lesser penalty as the court may decree.'

First-priority supervision requires that a proposed experiment be described in minute detail and submitted for approval, and that, if it is approved, it shall be performed by Security scientists only, with the proponent advised of the results only if (a) the official Security scientists consider it safe and/or desirable to perform it, (b) if they find the time to do so, and (c) if they desire to pass on the information gained. Actually, restricting a line of research to first-priority supervision means simply that no research was done.

Jim Hunt had been sentenced for violation of the law. And it was too late to prevent the danger. Security had detectors which could show up the existence of thought-fields and their intensity. But Security wouldn't allow experiment to develop thought-transmission, because the practice could be desperately dangerous.

But thought-transmission was a fact. It was being used. And Security had prevented the discovery of means to control it. In all the world only Jim Hunt knew of this specific gap in the Security system which claimed to protect men against their own abilities.

But that gap was enough to wreck all of civilization. It was ironic that the only evidence so far was the intrusion of tiny, nibbling thoughts into the brain of one man on the edge of sleep, and that man a criminal for having learned to recognize it.

Now he lay at the edge of a small clearing and watched a log cabin and the languid movements of the family which inhabited it. In three hours he learned that there were two adults and seven children living there. There were a grown girl and two gangling boys in their teens, the rest ranged down to a baby whom he hadn't seen but had heard wailing.

ALL seemed languid to the point of being unnatural. All were apathetic as if they were weak. The children of an age to play sat down on the bare earth outside the cabin and fumbled with clumsy toys or talked. They did not run.

One of the adolescent boys sat on the edge of the porch and looked vacantly into space. That was all. Toward noon the man of the family went slowly to a nearby field and hoed in it without energy. He stopped often to rest.

Jim Hunt studied every movement and every action that he could see. These folk looked unwell. They looked as if they might be chronic sufferers from hookworm. But the farm, though poor and slovenly enough, at least appeared as if there had been work done on it in the past. It was difficult to believe that this lackadaisical, unenergetic family could earn a living on rocky hillside land.

At noon he felt sure that, whatever the

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decision had been on the *Cinquoin* as to his fate and whatever or whoever was responsible for the sly small thoughts he'd picked up, he would be in no danger from this family. They had surely no thought of trying to hunt down a fugitive from a Security ship. They had not the energy.

And if the thoughts he'd picked up had not been directed at him but had been picked up simply because he was in the neighborhood of their focus, they wouldn't know of his existence at all. They surely weren't responsible for those thoughts and in any case he had not much fear that his own reaction to them had been noted.

The transmission of thought is difficult enough. To receive clearly from a chosen un-amplified individual consciousness, with other consciousnesses present, should be impossible. The transmitter of those soothing ideas of happiness very probably was unaware of Jim's existence. Still. . . .

He wormed his way back into the wood and brushed himself off carefully. He went through undergrowth and trees to where a trail led to the farm. He marched confidently ahead. Presently he came out into the clearing. He cast his eyes about as if seeing it for the first time. He walked toward the house.

The children sitting in the dirt turned their heads and stared at him. The adolescent on the edge of the porch raised his eyes and looked at him dumbly. The father of the family, off in a nearby field, stopped and leaned on his hoe.

"Howdy," said Jim Hunt, whose crime had been a desire to push back the boundaries of scientific knowledge. "I'm trampin'. Got any grub for a fella that'll work for it?"

The adolescent boy spoke listlessly.

"Y'll have to ask Paw. That's him out in the field. Right lot o' work to do, though."

Jim turned to look at the man who leaned on his hoe. As he looked, slowly and as if with infinite effort that man straightened from his leaning and came toward the house.

"He's coming now," said Jim. "I'll wait."

He sat on the porch. He regarded the children, who stared at him blankly. He began to feel queer. He looked at the gangling boy and felt queerer. Presently there were slow footsteps and the grown girl came out on the porch. He looked at her and felt queerer still.

He felt an odd chilliness at the back of his neck. These people, children and all, had an odd expression which was compounded of equal parts of an unearthly tranquillity and a settled exhaustion. The net result was something to chill the blood.

They weren't alarming in themselves but he thought of the sly, soothing thoughts in the night. But for that experience Jim might have considered this family merely as unusually pale and sickly-looking. Even now he had no real reason to couple their appearance with the terrifying surmises those nibbling thoughts had roused. Reason, indeed, insisted that there was no connection. But the feeling of connection was there.

The grown girl looked at him. She could have been pretty had she been less pale and thin. She spoke listlessly.

"How-do, stranger. My, you look strong!" Then she paused, her eyes abstracted. "We don't see many strangers here. Where you from?"

"Trampin'," said Jim Hunt, remembering to drop the final g. "Just trampin'. You get kinda hungry trampin', too. I thought I'd try to earn a meal."

The man from the field came slowly up to the house. His face was seamed and weather-beaten. He had the craggy features of the mountaineer. He had that queer expression of tranquillity overlaying exhaustion, too, but in his face there was also an odd content of bewilderment.

JIM HUNT stood up.

"Howdy," he said quietly. "I stopped by to see if I could do some work for some grub."

The farmer looked at him with lacklustre eyes. He opened his mouth to speak. Then he turned and raised his eyes skyward. On the same instant Jim Hunt heard, too. It was the queer, whispering roar of a jet-rotor. There was a helicopter somewhere near—which would be Security Police looking for Jim Hunt's body or some indication of his escape.

The helicopter drifted into sight above the treetops with the Security symbol painted on its side. It came overhead with a swift, dragon-fly movement. It halted. The farmer shaded his eyes and stared up. Jim Hunt looked upward too, with his hand placed to shade his eyes and conceal his face. But he was conscious only of an enormous, despairing calm. He was caught. Worse, they'd never believe. . . .

"We are Security Police," barked a voice aloft, through an amplifying loud-speaker. *"A man jumped from a ship overhead last*

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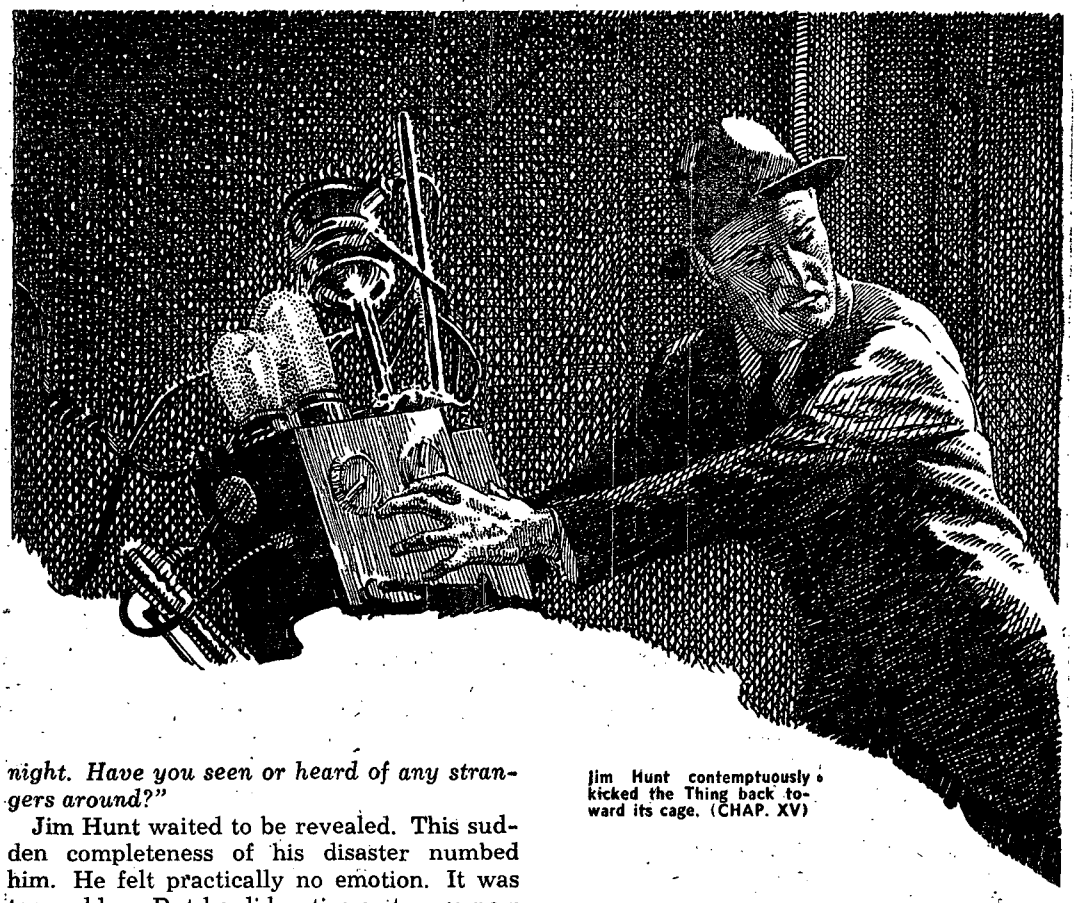

Jim Hunt contemptuously kicked the Thing back toward its cage. (CHAP. XV)

night. Have you seen or heard of any strangers around?"

Jim Hunt waited to be revealed. This sudden completeness of his disaster numbed him. He felt practically no emotion. It was too sudden. But he did notice a strange new tension in the people about him.

Thoughts came yammering into his head—agitated, angry, raging thoughts.

"No. . . No. . . No strangers. . . Nobody at all. . . No. . . No. . ."

The farmer cupped his hands and shouted.

"Ain't seen no strangers. Ain't seen nobody but my own kinfolk for a week!"

The amplified voice from the helicopter replied promptly.

"He didn't have a parachute. If you find his body, there's a reward."

The helicopter moved on above the treetops. It was gone. There was silence. The farmer lowered his gaze and looked bewilderedly at Jim Hunt.

"Now why'd I say that?" he asked in weak irritation. "Why'd I tell 'em there wasn't no strangers around when there was him right here?"

"You was told, Paw," the grown girl said quickly. "I was scared you wouldn't ketch it. You was told!"

The farmer shook his head, his forehead creased.

"Maybe . . . maybe," he said helplessly. "Seems to me like I'm goin' crazy sometimes. Things come to me an' I do 'em an' afterward seems like I don't know why—an' then I do. . . ."

Jim Hunt swallowed.

"I know why," he said. "It's like a voice speaking in your mind. Mostly it says, 'Nice . . . this is nice. . . . that is nice. . . .' Isn't that so?"

The farmer stared at him.

"How'd you know, stranger?"

Jim smiled grimly. He knew that he was deathly pale from the nearness of his capture by Security. But he rather suspected that there was at least as much danger here, trying to be free, as in the defiance of Security.

"Some people," said Jim, "just take that voice for granted. Some people don't. That's all." Then he said deliberately, "How about

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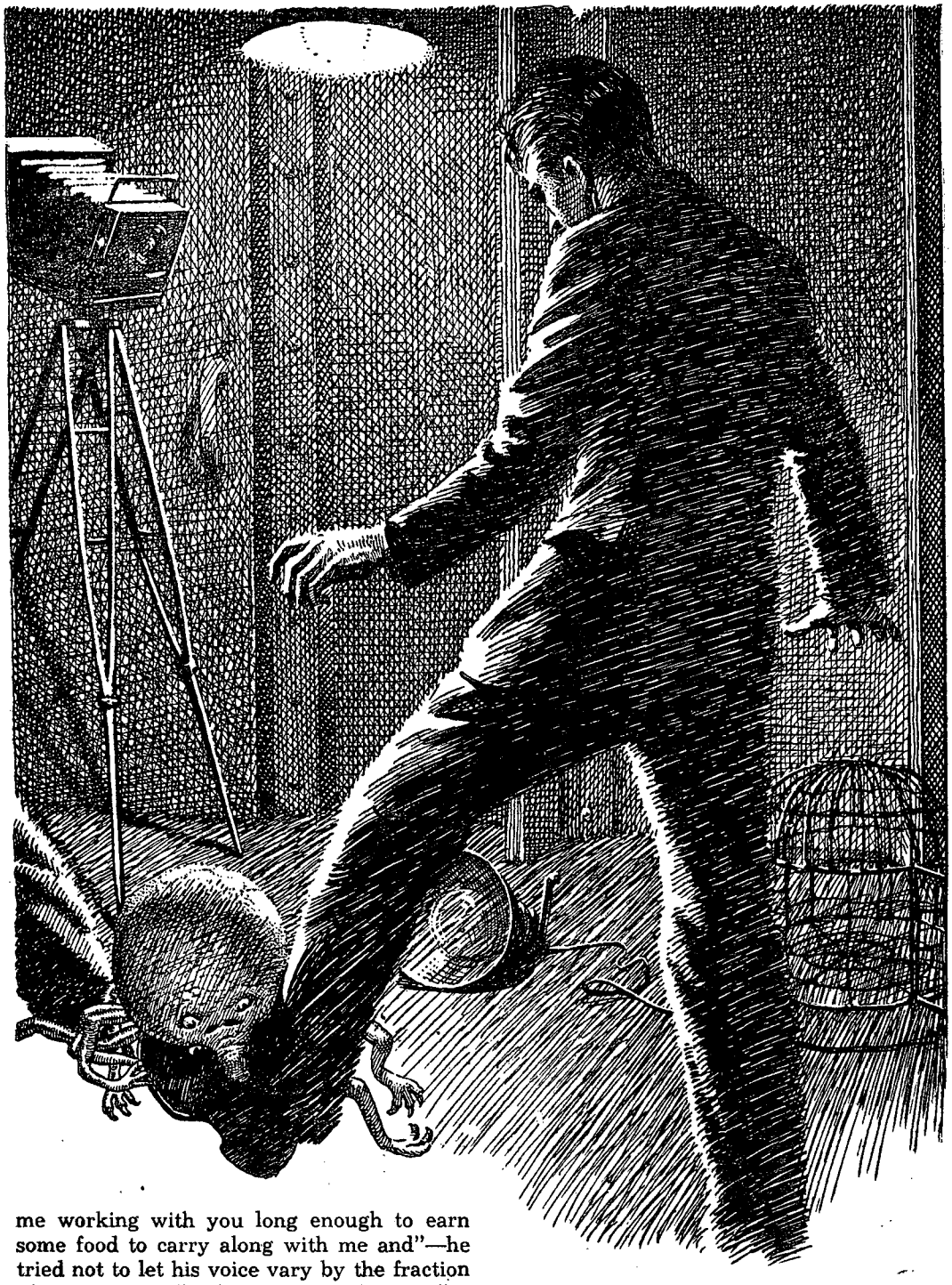

me working with you long enough to earn some food to carry along with me and"—he tried not to let his voice vary by the fraction of a semitone—"and a pot to cook it in?"

The farmer stared at him again. He had been stirred up and enormously stimulated in some fashion. Now the stimulus was wearing off. He nodded weakly.

"All right. You get somethin' to eat an' then come out in the field. Bring a hoe with you. But I don't understan'. . . ."

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He went feebly back to the place where he had been working. The grown girl spoke softly. Jim turned with a start. She was no longer listless. Her eyes were wide and intent. She smiled at him warmly.

"Come in the house, stranger," she said softly. "We'll give you somethin' to eat an' you can help Paw later." Then she added in an amused, confidential tone, "Paw's funny. The Little Fella don't like Paw much. He'll like you, though. . ." Her voice grew eager. "Maybe he'll want you to stay here—for good! That'd be nice. . . ."

Jim Hunt felt his spine crawling as he went into the house. He wasn't sure, of course. He was in a turmoil of emotion, now, and emotion—particularly rage—tends to block out such things as transmitted thoughts. It was the means he'd used to defend himself the night before.

But it seemed to Jim that ideas were trying gently and ever so smoothly to worm their way into his mind. And it seemed to him that something was trying to make him think.

"Nice. . . This is nice. . . It would be terrible to go away from here. . . This is nice. . . It will be good to stay here. . . ." . . . . . .

A surge of fury swept over him. Someone was trying to control him with the very thing Security had condemned him to life custody for trying to understand—Transmitted thought. But fury was an excellent defense against it.

CHAPTER III

The Iron Hat

THOUGHTS in the moonlight. Undulating hills and upward-rearing mountains. Spread of waving forest underneath the stars. Armies of trees, changing valorously over the hilltops. Here and there small clearings and little log cabins with tiny yellow glows in their windows.

And thoughts in the night. Thoughts of glee and gluttony. Of reckless, rebellious zest. Of uproarous and horrible satisfaction—and a cold and icy thought which raged at the others. The native life on this planet was intelligent. Aroused, it could be dangerous.

There was need for planning. What had been done was sound enough but they did not yet control a fraction of the planet's inhabitants. With their numbers they could not yet control the whole. They must be cautious! They must be wise!

Thoughts of laughter and defiance. Then soberer, drowsy, satiated agreement. Yes, they must be cautious. But these folk, these "men" were such easy prey! They had no idea that thoughts could be projected. They could not communicate with each other save by speech and their thoughts were feeble and did not carry.

It was inconvenient that even stronger minds could not pick up the feeble thoughts of men—but it was convenient because those stronger minds could communicate freely with each other. And since men were such easy prey. . . .

Thoughts of sensuous, infinitely agreeable satiation went through the moonlight. The cold, icy thought came savagely again. Caution! It was necessary to learn more about these men before all would be safe! All men were not like those under control. Some knew more. Much more.

They had ground-vehicles and primitive flying craft and they could speak over great distances by their machines. For that matter a flying craft had been searching these hills today for a man who had jumped from another flying craft. There was organization among these men. If they coöperated. . . .

A thought said comfortably that the man who had jumped was known. He was under—the thought hesitated and then said angrily that he was not yet under control. Not yet. But he would be! He was awake, and he raged when thoughts were sent to him, so the thoughts had not yet sunk into his brain. But he would be controlled! There was a female who would be made to lull him.

The moonlight was bright and tranquil. The trees waved their branches gently in the night-wind. There were little clearings in the forest, and little houses in them, and there was a village down in the valley. There was a city, too, not many miles away, where many folk slept like the people in the mountain cabins.

They were pale and thin and they looked as if they had labored to the very edge of collapse. But the face of each and every one wore an expression of an odd, unearthly tranquility—especially those who were asleep.

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The thoughts in the moonlight dwindled. But suddenly there came a triumphant, strong, clear thought. The man who was a fugitive, who had resisted by fury when thoughts were sent to him—that man no longer resisted. Doubtless the man slept now. When he woke he would be definitely controlled, and then everything the wiser men knew would be available. . . .

The world, of course, was bright and new and shining on its sunlit side, and restful and peaceful and secure where night clothed it. In the countries where the sun shone men and women worked and children played and where the stars looked down they slept quietly.

But all assured themselves that they were secure. They were perfectly, perfectly safe. The world was made safe by Security, which was an organization of quite the wisest men on earth. They were at once the greatest scientists and the most able administrators. They had the welfare of everybody in mind.

They had begun, of course, by forbidding anybody to experiment with atom bombs because the human race could be wiped out by so few of them. They could make all the earth's atmosphere poisonously radioactive. Then everybody would die. But Security prevented that.

And presently it forbade the use of atomic energy as such in any form because, of course, any generator of atomic power makes radioactivity which may escape into the air. Not long after that, the wise men of Security learned that someone had been experimenting with germs and by accident had created a new and very deadly mutation.

It could have been used in biological warfare, but also it could have released a new and very deadly plague upon the world. So Security forbade experiments with germs. And still later a physicist discovered the principle of a very tiny generator which developed incredibly high voltages. Beams of deadly radiation became possible. So Security had to take steps to protect the world from that.

SECURITY was very wise and very conscientious. It did not stop all scientific advance, of course. Its scientists experimented very carefully, in especially set-up Experimental Zones, with all due care that nothing could happen to endanger the people of Earth. Which meant, naturally, that they did not make any very dangerous experiments.

In time Security took a fatherly interest in public health because new plagues sometimes arise in nature. It issued directives governing quarantine and medicine in general and, of course, travel by individuals because individuals are sometimes disease-carriers. And presently it was inevitable that Security should give advice on education, and arrange that technical knowledge should be restricted to stable personalities.

In a complex modern civilization a single paranoiac could cause vast damage if he were technically informed. So presently everybody took psychological tests, and those who received technical educations were strictly licensed by Security. Then libraries were combed and emptied of dangerous facts that lunatics could use to the detriment of mankind.

The people of Earth were very secure. They were protected against everything that Security could imagine as happening to them. But they weren't free any longer. The tragedy was that many of the guiding minds of Security were utterly sincere, though there were self-seekers and politicians merely seeking soft jobs and importance among Security officials.

The guiding minds believed devoutly that they served humanity by using their greater knowledge and wisdom to protect human beings from themselves. But somehow, knowing their own motives, they did not see that they had created the most crushing tyranny ever known to men.

But Jim Hunt knew it. Yet he knew that even the tyranny of Security, which essayed to control men's actions, was as nothing besides a tyranny which might control their thoughts. Whatever or whoever could send transmitted thoughts into a man's brain could control his inmost self.

A man does not question the opinions his own brain tells him it believes. His mind could become a robot's mind, believing and remembering only what it was told. His actions would become a robot's actions, motivated only by blind and abject loyalty to his unknown master. But even Jim had no idea of the depths of horror the present situation could hold.

He walked with Sally in the moonlight, along the woods-trail leading to the cabin. She pressed close to him, her arm through his. The unearthly tranquility of her features

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was broken a little by a secretive half-smile.

"You're funny, Jim," she said softly.

He'd been abstracted, fumbling in the back of his mind for possible intrusive and alien thoughts.

"How so, Sally?"

"You act funny," she said, smiling at him. "You act like you ain't been told!"

"Told what?" asked Jim. Suddenly he was intent. He remembered what she'd said to her father—that he'd been "told" to say to the Security fliers that there was no stranger anywhere about. "What should I have been told?"

"You know!" she protested. "You're teasin' me!"

He hesitated, reasoning swiftly.

"M-maybe," he said after an instant. "What were you told?"

She smiled up at him.

"You know!"

"About what?" he insisted.

"About—us," said Sally. "What we're goin' to do, you an' me. About you stayin' at the cabin always, an' us—us. . . ."

She smiled confidently up at him. There were prickles at the back of his neck. Then a slow, red fury swept over him. But he spoke quietly.

"Go on!"

"Us—gettin' married," said Sally softly. "I knew it was the Little Fella tellin' me I loved you. Oh, sure! But I'd ha' done it anyway! An' when he told me we were goin' to get married I was—awful glad. Were you?"

Jim Hunt stood still. The girl's face was radiant—but so terribly pale and tired! It was unspeakably pathetic. But this was a chance to learn what the victims of those nibbling thoughts could tell.

"Listen, Sally," said Jim and despite himself some grimness crept into his voice. "When did the—Little Fella tell you all this?"

"While we were eatin' supper," said Sally, still smiling. "Didn't you notice?"

He shook his head, cold all over. "Little Fella" meant something—the source of the whispered thoughts. But no previous guess of his at a transmitter of thought could possibly have earned such a nickname. He had not imagined fondness for the source of the whisperings, though of course fondness could be created by suggestion like anything else.

But the use of a diminutive—the complete submission implied in her rejoicing that she was "told" that she was going to marry him—the whole atmosphere of unquestioning acceptance of the control of her life and that of everybody else—these things did not add up.

"I guess I'm dumb, Sally," he said slowly. "I didn't know about it. I wasn't—I haven't been told yet."

She did not flush. It looked as if she didn't have blood enough in her to flush. But she looked ashamed. Then she said softly, "But he'll tell you! If he told me he'll tell you too! I hope you'll be glad, Jim!"

JIM spoke bluntly, very cold and raging for the girl before him.

"I came from a long way off, Sally. What is a Little Fella? I've never seen one. I don't know exactly what you mean?"

She regarded him blankly.

"You don't know? You ain't. . . ." Then she looked frightened. "I shouldn't ha' said anything! I can't talk about him excep'—"

She caught her breath in terror. Jim put his hand on her shoulder.

"He can't hear what you said!"

"But if he wants I should tell him, I *got* to!" She trembled. But it was not quite fear in the normal sense. She was terrified by the discovery that she had done something she should not have done. She was afraid of the fact, not of its consequences.

"But—but oh, sure!" she said presently, self-reassured. "You'll know all about it presently! He'll tell you, an' he'll tell you to love me, if you don't, an' we'll get married an' stay right here for always. . . ."

She was comforted. Jim forced himself to ruthlessness. He asked questions. The answers came. Sally had been told to love him. So she did. Of course—one always did what the Little Fella told one to do.

Yes—the idea came into one's mind that it would please the Little Fella, and one did it. Yes—of course! How could anybody not do what the Little Fella wanted? How could anybody want to do what he didn't want? The Little Fella was—was. . . .

There she stopped. There was a mental block that kept her from saying more. No question, however indirect or shrewd, would bring out anything else. But he persisted.

Presently she said in a choked voice, "He—he tol' me we was goin' to be m-married an' so I was to be awful nice t' you."

She buried her face in her hands. Abysmal shame overwhelmed her. She sobbed. And

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Jim, standing beside her in her humiliation, knew that whatever bond kept her subject had been broken. For a little while she could see clearly. But still she could not speak of what she was forbidden to speak.

Presently Jim soothed her as well as he could. He held her comfortingly close and told her gently that he'd only been curious. He didn't know anything about the Little Fella. It was all new to him. But she hadn't done anything wrong.

Not in talking to him, because the Little Fella hadn't warned her. And of course when he, Jim, learned about the Little Fella and how people must do what he said and, of course, when the Little Fella told him about their getting married. . . .

Her tears dried. She grew radiant again and somehow maternal. They walked together back toward the farmhouse. Then, when it loomed dark before them with only a single tiny glimmer of light in one window, she whispered, "Jim, when we get inside, you—you kiss me. So's the Little Fella'll hear an' think we' been kissin' outside."

Her hand trembled on his arm. He nodded.

He did kiss her in the dark main room of the cabin, with no illumination save the dying coals of the fireplace.

"Goodnight, Jim."

Then Jim was left alone. And a murderous fury filled him. He had learned much but not enough. He had not yet had time to sort out what he had learned but he knew savagely that he had been right and Security wrong.

The danger Security feared had come true more horribly than any Security official could imagine. But his fury was in behalf of the thin, weary, enslaved folk in this cabin—and for the girl Sally.

But he had been a night and two days without sleep and his mind would not be clear. Also there was the danger that in his weariness the Little Fella—whatever thing devised in hell a Little Fella could be—might put soothing, convincing thoughts into his mind. . . .

He went to the fireplace. There was a great iron pot beside it. At the moment it was empty. He held it in his hands. As cast iron, its hysteresis-constant should be high. He raised it over his head and carefully let down his guard.

"Nice . . ." said the sly and insinuating and somehow loathsome thought. "Very nice . . . Sally is nice. . . Sally is fun. . . It will be nice to stay here. . . Sally. . . ."

He lowered the iron pot carefully over his head. The thoughts dimmed. He lay down on the corn-husk mattress spread on the floor for him. For a time he was unwillingly alert. Presently he was calm again. He slipped his head partly out of the iron pot. Thoughts came to him once more.

He listened to them in stark horror. Before they could seize him—but his horror itself was a defense—he drew the pot down over his head again.

It was very uncomfortable but ultimately he managed to sleep. And he woke in the morning with the certain knowledge that his mind had not been tampered with while he slumbered. It was quaint to think that he was able to see clearly and think clearly because he'd imitated the fabled ostrich—by hiding his head.

But there was sound reason. He'd insulated his laboratory with quarter-inch plates of high-hysteresis iron. Nothing his apparatus produced could go through that! An iron cooking-pot neatly if absurdly duplicated the insulation.

But his feelings were grim indeed. The few thoughts he'd dared listen to made him feel sick with fear for the rest of mankind. But it was humorous to know, from that listening, that the iron pot he'd worn had been not only a protection against the thought-field directed upon him, but had absorbed that field so it seemed that he had no protection.

CHAPTER IV

Little Fellas

NEXT morning it became clear that a change was assumed to have taken place in him. Sally's father looked at him with lack-lustre eyes at breakfast.

"You' goin' to town today, Jim," he said heavily. "When you come back you take over an' finish hoein' the field we were workin' in yesterday."

For an instant, Jim did not grasp it. Then Sally spoke softly.

"Town's Clearfield, Jim. There's a—courthouse there."

Still Jim did not quite grasp it. Sally's mother broke in with a trace of wistfulness.

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"It'd be nice to've had it in church, though. I always figured. . . ."

Then it sank home. The ridiculous iron pot had protected him not only from transmitted thoughts, but from giving any sign of having been protected. Whatever or whoever the Little Fella might be, the thoughts that had been "told" to Sally and the rest were now believed to have been implanted in Jim's mind while he slept.

He was assumed to have absorbed all needful instructions and commands during his slumber. He was believed to have waked with an entire pattern of behavior in his mind, and which had all the effect of his own decision and desire.

This family had been told that he would stay in this cabin. That he would help in the fields. That he would marry Sally—today—in a town called Clearfield. And Sally's mother accepted unquestioningly the fact that he and Sally were to walk into town and be married and that, in the afternoon, Jim would work in the fields.

They classed him as one of them now—as subject to the same force that made them pale and worn-out robots.

He went white as he realized the truth. Then Sally spoke in explanation to her parents.

"Jim's goin' to have to talk to Mr. Hagger. I don't know how long that'll be."

Jim said nothing. His flesh crawled at the narrowness of his escape. If a human being knew what transmitted thought was like, he might repel the thought-field of the Little Fella while he stayed awake—especially if he raged.

A thought-field wasn't a radiation. It was a field of force, a strain in space like an electrostatic field. It could be repelled by another thought-field contained in a man's own skull. But during sleep it couldn't be fought off. It would be absorbed.

Its absorption would be evident—like the removal or neutralization of a static charge. And the iron pot that had stayed over Jim's head during the night had absorbed the thought-field directed upon him.

Jim found himself sweating profusely. He was to go into this village of Clearfield since he was believed to be a robot. He was to marry Sally in the belief that it was his own desire. And he was to talk to a Mr. Hagger. Maybe this Mr. Hagger was the operator of the transmitter. If so he must be killed and the transmitter smashed.

"You remember, don't you, Jim?" asked Sally.

He hesitated. The food in his mouth was tasteless as ashes. But while they thought he was a robot like themselves they would talk freely. Sally had been indiscreet last night because she hadn't known that he was free. On the way to town she might talk again.

"I guess so," said Jim slowly. "When you say it I remember. But my head don't feel so clear this mornin'. Like I dreamed a lot last night."

"Paw was like that," said Sally wisely. "Sometimes he's like that now. It takes time for you to get used to the Little Fella tellin' you things." Then she said hopefully. "But you're kinda glad, ain't you, Jim?"

He mumbled. He continued to sweat.

"What time do we start?"

"Soon's we finish breakfast," said Sally. "I'm glad, Jim!"

He felt sick inside. He was desperately sorry for Sally. But he was also desperately sorry for her family and for the others who were subject to this unthinkable tyranny. And there was the rest of the world, too. He, himself, was a criminal in the eyes of Security but he had taken upon himself the responsibility for the security of all mankind against a menace Security knew nothing about.

He could not yet guess at any plan behind the use of transmitted thought but its effect upon those subject to it was not only abject mental slavery. There was a physical effect of terrible weakness and lethargy. Anyone who used such a thing could be nothing less than a monster. No ambition or even insanity could make the crime forgiveable.

SALLY rose from the table and vanished. She came back dressed in her best. There was almost color in her cheeks at she looked at Jim.

"I'm ready, Jim," she said softly.

He stood up. He felt that he was white as death but he remembered that Sally had had him kiss her in this same room last night so that the Little Fella would hear and think that they had been kissing in the moonlight outside.

Which was proof that what went on in this room could be overheard. Also it proved that the thoughts of the slaves were not read by their masters. They were only controlled.

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He walked beside Sally to the trail in the woods. Once the trees had closed about them he spoke abruptly.

"How far is Clearfield, Sally?"

"Six miles, Jim." She was quiet; filled with a still rapture. She said suddenly, "Jim! I want you should know. The Little Fella told me I loved you, but I loved you before! You b'lieve that, don't you?"

"I believe it."

They went on. Sally walked steadily, upheld by an inner exaltation. Jim felt himself a scoundrel but a scoundrel forced by greater need than his own life or his own happiness—or that of Sally or any other individual. If human beings could be reduced to slavery more complete than ever before in history something had to be done about it!

"I told you, Sally, that my head wasn't clear this morning," he said harshly. "You can tell me anything now, can't you?"

She looked at him with soft eyes.

"I don't know, Jim. If you ain't seen this Little Fella yet I don't guess I can talk about him so much. I'm told not ever to talk about him or what he looks like. Not to nobody."

"But that's what I want to know!" said Jim.

She smiled at him, wisely.

"I got an idea," she said, "that you' goin' to talk to the Little Fella that tells Mr. Hagger things. That's why I got to take you to Mr. Hagger. The Little Fella down in the village."

"What!" said Jim. His voice cracked suddenly. "There's more than one of them?"

"Oh, lots!" said Sally in surprise. "Most every family round here has a Little Fella that tells 'em what to do! It ain't any harm to tell you that, is there, Jim? Now that our Little Fella tells you things?"

Jim's scalp crawled. He almost staggered in his walk. He had been thinking in terms of an individual working a thought-transmitter. He had been imagining a paranoiac, an egomaniac, a psychopathic individual insanely planning the subjugation of the world to his mad will. The horrible part was that it might be done. But this. . . .

He felt weak, suddenly.

"Let's—let's sit down a minute, Sally," he said. "I feel queer."

She was all solicitude. She took his arm.

"Here's a tree-trunk, Jim. Set down a while. It—takes you that way."

She watched him anxiously. Then she sat down beside him and took his hand in hers.

"The—Little Fella is greedy," she said regretfully. "It's too bad, Jim. The first time you go up to him, specially, it seems like you'll never be able to get down that ladder again. I fainted! But you're so strong, Jim! You'll be all right." Then she said in a startled fashion. "But—Jim! You said you hadn't never seen him!"

A terrible and quite preposterous suspicion was growing in Jim's mind. With it, horror so great that it amounted to panic.

"He's not a human being!" he said, almost shrilly.

His expression called for solicitude again. Sally forgot her bewilderment. She soothed him, smiling anxiously.

"Of course not, Jim! He's cute! So tiny an' so cute. He's the cutest li'l thing."

He stared at her. But the monstrousness of it was too great even for emotion. When he spoke his voice was precariously steady. At a wrong intonation he felt he would go mad.

[*Turn page*]

TOPS FOR QUALITY
BIGGER AND BETTER

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"This—Little Fella—where'd he come from—when?"

"'Bout a month ago, Jim," she said soothingly. "We were settin' on our porch 'round sundown when a half-dozen of our neighbors come out of the road to our house. Some of 'em come from a long ways off. They were carryin' things that we couldn't see, at first.

"They come up an' one of 'em says, 'We brought you somethin' you're goin' to be right happy to have.' An' all of a sudden we knew we were glad. Awful glad! We said we was awful, awful glad to have what they was bringin' us!"

JIM made a strangled noise. He could not look at her.

"There was six of the Little Fellas, Jim! The neighbors was carryin' them! An' they was so cute! We knew, right away, that we had to have a Little Fella to live with us an' tell us what to do!" Sally smiled reminiscently.

"The folks stayed around about an hour, an' we got gladder an' gladder an' gladder an' then they went away again, carryin' all the Little Fellas but the one that stayed with us. We fixed him up a li'l nest in the attic right nex' to the chimney so's he'd be nice an' warm. He's been with us ever since an' we' been glad every minute!"

Jim spoke thickly.

"But he's greedy."

"Yeah . . . awful greedy—but cute, Jim, so cute. . . ." Her finger strayed inside the collar of her dress. She fumbled delicately with the skin. There were tiny scars there—very tiny scars. One was not quite healed. "Y'don't mind, Jim, he's so cute. . . ."

Jim saw. And he was filled with horror and an all-encompassing rage which was so terrible that for a moment he almost ceased to be human, himself. It showed on his face. Sally looked at his expression and shrank away.

"Jim! Are you mad with me?"

"No!" said Jim thickly. "Not with you! But I'm going to kill that Little Fella! I'm going to kill all the Little Fellas! I'm going to let the world know what they are and what they do and they'll be exterminated so terribly—"

"*Jim!*" She stood up, crying out fiercely. "You *cain't* talk that way about the Little Fellas! I—I love you, Jim, but you cain't talk about killin' the Little Fellas!" Then she said in a new, frightened, panicky voice, "I got to tell him, Jim! I got to tell the Little Fella what you said! I cain't help myself—I—cain't!"

Suddenly she turned and ran from him, sobbing terribly. He started up.

But cold reason told him he could do nothing. Short of kidnapping her and holding her prisoner he could not do anything at all. Wherever he might take her she would still be subject to the Things she called Little Fellas.

He knew they were not human now and he had a blood-chilling suspicion of what they might be. But she should come to no greater harm now than before. The urgent thing, of greater importance than anything else on earth, was somehow to get these facts known to the rest of humanity—even Security. . . .

If he was to get the news away he must carry it. And when Sally sobbingly reported what she could not help telling he would be in danger more deadly and more imminent than ever before. Since the Little Fella could transmit thought to humans once they were subject to him, it was more than likely that he could transmit thought even more completely to his own kind.

Jim dived into the wood, trying at one and the same time to remember every trick of woodcraft he had learned as a small boy when such things seemed important, and to maintain a fierce, seething, deliberate rage for protection against what might be an irresistible concentration of transmitted thought upon him.

Six Little Fellas had subjugated Sally's family while they were awake. Only one had so far worked on him. But there must be many more than six—if all combined their power one man's mere fury might be hopelessly not enough. . . .

CHAPTER V

Pursuit

FLIGHT became a release for all his panic, and he ran like a madman through the trees. He fled crazily until an unseen obstacle caught him across the middle and threw him to the ground. He gasped in fear, and then realized that a single strand of wire had been stapled from tree to tree to

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form the rudest possible sort of a boundary-line. He had run into it, full-tilt.

Panic came back. When Sally got home and told the Little Fella, if all the Little Fellas knew and concentrated upon him a concentrated intensity of thought-field, he would stop in his tracks. He would suddenly feel very very glad that he was going to be subject to the Little Fellas. He would be inordinately happy about it. And Sally might reach home at any instant.

He put his hand on the wire, to vault it. Then he realized. . . . He began to work with maniacal haste. He found the nearest staple of the wire. He twisted it frantically back and forth and back and forth until it broke. It seemed ages before he had a loose end in his hand. But instantly thereafter he was coiling it feverishly as he moved toward the next point of stapling.

His hands shook. He panted in an ecstasy of terror—not only for himself but for other humans as yet unaware. He wound the wire in a close flat spiral, working with more desperate haste than any man in all the world had ever worked before.

He had the spiral big enough. Fifteen—twenty feet of wire were coiled into an untidy disk some twelve inches across. Then came a soundless thought in his mind.

"Not nice. . . Not nice to hate the Little Fellas. . . Little Fellas are nice. . . It is not nice to judge them. . . It is wrong to think of hating them without seeing one to know what he is like. . . . "

Jim Hunt sobbed. This was no tentative, insinuating thought that would creep unnoticed into a man's brain and twist and warp his judgement while he knew of nothing going wrong. This could not be thrust away. This could not be shut out though he fought it desperately. He tried to continue to make his disk of iron wire. He stumbled.

The thoughts were suddenly stronger. Much stronger.

"The right thing is to see a Little Fella. . . Yes. . . Of course. . . It will be wise and nice and good to see a Little Fella. . . "

Then, suddenly, the thoughts were overwhelming

"It will be terrible to wait. . . It is impossible to wait. . . A Little Fella must be seen at once. . . . Now. . . It is urgent. . . . "

These thoughts were in the forefront of his consciousness. He could not think of anything else. They were his thoughts. They were his only thoughts. They were all his mind contained. . .

He tripped and fell. A sharp branch stabbed his cheek, dangerously close to his eye. The pain drove out everything else for the fraction of a second. In that morsel of time pure panic returned to him and he clapped the flat plate of wire over his head and pulled it down, stretching it until it covered even his ears.

He stood still, trembling. He had a disk-shaped spiral of iron wire and when he pulled it down over his head it stretched into a sort of bird-cage. It was a ridiculous sort of cap. But iron absorbed the thought-field. It weakened it enormously. He could still feel the nagging, compelling thoughts. They hovered about him, trying to take over his brain. But they were only whispers now.

"Little Fellas are friendly. . . Little Fellas are nice. . . It will be good to see a Little Fella and ask him to explain. . . ."

Jim Hunt set to work to free himself from the yet unbroken end of the wire, of which only one end had been coiled into this eccentric head-gear.

When he'd broken the wire once more he fastened the cap firmly in place with a strand of wire under his chin. Then he broke the fence again and began to make a second cap—a much more complete one, containing many more turns of wire and much more closely spaced.

He made the exchange with great caution and desperate haste. But the Little Fellas couldn't read his thoughts. They couldn't know what he was doing. They lay quietly, greedily, in nests which human beings had made for them. They thought, and their thoughts went out and focused, and they waited placidly for the person to whom they were directed to obey.

This second cap shut out the thoughts completely. They were no longer even whispers. So, very composedly, Jim made two more. One of the extras he would put on Sally's head. One he would force on her father—who would not have the physical strength to resist, no matter what commands the Little Fella gave him.

And once his mind was freed of control by the iron cap he could be made to understand—and he and Jim would go and kill the thing which lay in a soft nest up in the attic by the chimney. And then they would equip other men with caps of wire and. . . .

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IT SEEMED very simple and very sure. A gratified deadly vengefulness rose in Jim. Things—mere Things—from some unknown hell would take over human beings as domestic animals, would they? They'd tell humans what to do? They'd tell them as cattle are mated? They'd—they'd. . . .

Jim Hunt ground his teeth and cursed the Things he had not yet seen. Their method was clear now. A certain number of them could join to overwhelm the minds of human beings. Once overwhelmed and once conditioned by irresistible powerful suggestion, a human could never defend himself again.

One Thing could then control many humans, perhaps dozens, maybe hundreds. Now the Things controlled this tumbled, mountainous country. Their expansion was secret and piecemeal and irresistible. They had subjugated a countryside and a village, certainly.

There was no reason why they should not control a city, a nation, a world! All without violence and all without purpose other than that the Things should lie soft and warm and have human beings serve them and be the food for which they were always so greedy.

Pure human vanity was outraged at the bare idea that mankind could be subdued to be the cattle, the livestock only, of non-human creatures.

Jim was filled with blazing wrath when he set out to put into action the plan which seemed so sure. But it had taken a long time to make the second cap and the two extra ones. He'd made them very carefully so that not even a whisper of outside thought could penetrate to control a mind whose normal defenses—if any—had been destroyed. He had left the farm in the early morning. He started back two hours before sunset.

He did not try to retrace his steps exactly. He essayed to go back to Sally's home in a direct line. Perhaps two miles from it, he heard the creaking of a farm-wagon. He stopped short. He had almost blundered out upon a hill-country road which seemed filled with country-people.

There were only men. Most were armed with shot-guns or rifles. They were spread out in a long, irregular procession. Most looked pale and thin and sickly. Some few seemed stronger. All wore expressions of unearthly tranquillity—save when they spoke. Then they seemed to rage. Jim heard voices.

"Scoundrel!" said a voice bitterly. "Come outa the woods an' said he was hungry, an' they fed 'im, an' bedded 'im, an' he courted Sally."

Another voice, angrily, "Even the Little Fella didn't know."

Other voices said, "Hush!" and there was a pause.

"But, by golly!" rumbled the first voice furiously. "When him an' Sally started for town to git married, an' he. . . ."

Somebody came spurring back from the front of the line. There were forty or fifty men. There was one wagon. There were half a dozen horses. There were many guns.

"Keep y'eyes open!" commanded the man on horseback. "Maybe he don't know he's been found out yet. He's brash enough to show himself, thinkin' we don't know yet what he done. Try an' ketch him alive if y'can, but don't take no chances on him gittin' away!"

Jim Hunt's eyes flared, ten yards away in the thick underbrush. The sound of his movements had not been heard only because these people made too much noise themselves.

"She's sure'nough dead?" a voice asked harshly.

"What're we takin' the wagon for?" the man on horseback snapped. "Buryin' tomorrow down to Clearfield! She got back to the house an' told 'em what the fella done an' she died. He kilt her. He probably don't know we know it yet. He don't know how we git told things. Keep y'eyes open!"

The grumbling, trudging, small-sized mob moved on along the road. Presently it would reach the trail that led up to the farm of Sally's family. It would turn aside there.

Jim remained very still. He trembled a little with an icy passion.

He was clear-headed enough, though. He knew—now!—the mistake he had made. The idea that thought-transmission could be accomplished only by human beings had died hard. When Sally told him that the Little Fella was something else than human, something that was carried, something that stayed in a soft warm nest, something that was greedy of the life that flowed in human veins—even then Jim had not really grasped the fact.

Without thinking it out specifically he'd assumed that Sally wouldn't be punished

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for something she could not help. That when she fled back to her home and gasped heart-brokenly that Jim, whom she loved, had threatened to kill the Little Fella her loyalty to that Little Fella would move him at least to mercy in return.

It wasn't so. Sally was dead. And Jim knew quite surely how she'd died. All the family was weak and exhausted and drained of all energy and she'd said the Little Fella was greedy. If Sally had failed to carry out his commands what would be more likely than that he'd indulged his greed without restraint?

There is a limit to the capacity of a human being for rage and grief and hatred. Jim had reached that limit. He was numb. To all intents Jim Hunt was wholly calm. He could think quite sanely of quite indifferent things. But somehow he did not happen to think of anything but ways to kill and kill and kill the Things he had not even seen.

CHAPTER VI

Ordeal by Fire

HE LAY in hiding next morning and watched Sally's family leave the cabin for Clearfield. They moved very silently, like ghosts—Sally's father and mother and her two gangling brothers and the younger children. Sally's mother carried the baby. They filed away into the woods-trail that would lead down to the highway. They looked pale and weak and sickly.

It seemed improbable that they could walk the six miles to Clearfield. But possibly a wagon would have been sent up for them. The armed mob that had come up here before was proof that human beings had not ceased to be human even under the control of the Things. They had emotions of indignation and surely they would feel compassion and pity too. Unless they were told not to.

But there was reason for public tumult to be encouraged among humans. The Things, so far, were all-powerful only within their own quite secret domain. Outside Jim had heard no hint of any strangeness in this part of the world. Security, too, with vastly more information of every sort, could have had no inkling of the enslavement of human beings to non-human Little Fellas.

The merest breath of such a suspicion would have had this place swarming with agents of Security. Some would doubtless have been overwhelmed and enslaved by the Little Fellas but surely some uneasiness would have gone undispelled.

The least hint of experiment with atomic energy or bacteriological mutation—X-ray apparatus which could produce mutations was now used only in the presence of a Security representative—invariably led to investigation so exhaustive that all the world dreaded it. And thought-transmission would surely lead to action if Security got a hint of it. Jim had reason to know that!

So there was reason to have a public excuse for any action which might become outside the Things' dominion. A wanton and brutal crime resulting in the death of Sally had been invented and was firmly believed in. If Jim were caught it was even possible that all his questioning would follow all the forms of law. But behind it would be the Little Fellas.

He watched the funeral party of Sally's family file into the woods and away. Sympathy would go out to them and fury would rise and the folk who attended Sally's funeral would turn to and hunt Jim down with a vengeful industry. They had a perfectly adequate motive in the tale they believed of the death of Sally. And nothing would happen to put the rest of the world on guard. Only—Jim had other ideas.

The party of mourners vanished. The world grew silent. There still were sounds, of course. The shrilling of insects and the cries of birds and, at long, irregular intervals, the plaintive whistle of a bob-white quail. There was bright, warm sunshine. But the tree-branches stirred hardly at all and the chickens in the farmhouse yard pecked languidly and the pigs in the pig-pen rooted and grunted without real energy.

Jim watched . . . and watched . . . and watched. He was very calm. He knew what he needed to do. It would be infinitely simple, the esential part of it, but he took no chances.

Mostly he watched the trail of smoke from the farmhouse chimney. The whole family had left. Jim had counted them. That should have left the house empty save for the Little Fella. But Jim had his doubts.

He was right to disbelieve. Half an hour

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after the disappearance of the family along the trail, the thin and steady line of ascending smoke was disturbed. The smoke thickened. Someone had put a log in the fireplace.

Half and hour later still, a man came out. He carried a rifle. He chopped wood. While Jim was at large and inexplicably immune to the commands of the Little Fella there must be a guard over every Little Fella. This man chopped a little and rested—and chopped a little more and rested. He went slowly back to the house with wood. He came out again and got his rifle. He went wearily into the house again.

Jim moved forward. He'd had plenty of time in which to spy out the land. There was a little rise which would hide him, if he crawled, until he could get the barn between himself and the house. He reached the barn.

He was taking a desperate chance but surely the scene of a supposed crime would be the last place where either the Little Fellas or the humans of this neighborhood would expect him to appear. People and Things alike would expect him to try flight at top speed to get as far as possible from this area.

PRESENTLY he wormed his way out of the bottom half of a door at the far end of the barn. He was behind the chicken-house. It was old and tumbledown. He found a wide plank, partly rotten at the bottom, which could be pulled away. He went inside without showing himself to the house.

There was no alarm. A beady-eyed abstracted hen sat on a nest. There were other laying-nests about. He crept to the door. Presently a hen entered. He caught her in a sudden snatch. A single squawk and she was still. Minutes later, another hen. A third hen got off a nest and essayed to cluck triumphantly. He caught her.

He was ready. A strip torn from his shirt tied one foot of each hen to one leg of the others. He put the three fowl down and crouched inside the door, watching the house through a crack.

The hens squawked. They tried to walk and could not. They scolded each other furiously. They waxed hysterical. They created a sustained outrageous din, fluttering crazily this way and that as first one and then another succeeded momentarily in imposing her hen-mindedness on the others. It sounded exactly as if some small animal had got into the chicken house and was wreaking havoc among the hens.

It was such a noise as no farm-bred man could hear without investigating. After some minutes a man came slowly out of the house. He carried a rifle and he walked exhaustedly. He was pale and thin and he wore an expression of unearthly tranquility. But he came out to see what was scaring the hens.

He pushed open the henhouse door and stepped in. Perhaps he expected to see the darting brown body of a fox go fleeing for the hole by which he had entered.

He found oblivion. Jim swung ruthlessly with a broken hoe-handle he'd picked up in the barn. The pale thin man collapsed. When he came to he was trussed up like a turkey. And there was a queerly uncomfortable cap made out of wire upon his head. Jim had his rifle.

"Listen," said Jim quietly. "With that cap on your head the Little Fella can't tell you anything. Notice?"

The man gaped, looking at the muzzle of his own gun held unwaveringly at his head.

"Who else is in the house?" asked Jim as quietly as before. His tone wasn't consciously menacing, but actually it was much more frightening than any attempt at threat could have been.

"One man," gasped his captive.

"You're going to call him," said Jim gently. "I won't kill him or you either if you do as I say. But you're going to do it! The Little Fella can't stop me. He can't make me do anything. But I can make you do anything, because I'll kill you if you don't."

His face was stone and his eyes were hard as granite.

The bound man cried out hoarsely.

"Again," said Jim softly.

The other man came out, puffing. As he entered the chicken-house Jim hit him savagely. Presently he came to, bound like his companion, with another wire cap on his head.

"These caps," said Jim sombrely, "are for your own good. So you won't hear anything the Little Fella tries to tell you. Believe me, you should be grateful to me for that!" He paused and added softly, "I'm the man who came out of the woods and asked Sally's father to feed me. I didn't kill Sally. The Little Fella did that—being greedy! You won't want to have the Little Fella telling you things for a while."

He walked openly toward the house, car-

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rying the first man's rifle. Two guards would be plenty for the Little Fella and more than two would have showed themselves somehow in the hour or more he'd watched from the edge of the clearing.

His calculation was right. The house was empty. He went casually inside and helped himself to what food was ready-cooked. He made a search and found a writing-tablet and pencils. He hunted further, and found faded envelopes. One was a ready-stamped envelope. He put them in his pocket.

Overhead, in the attic, was a soft nest close by the chimney. In it was a small greedy Thing, which had killed Sally and was one of other Things which were not human and yet dared to subjugate men as domestic animals for service and use and—food.

JIM did not hurry. He even looked for extra shells for the rifle in the coats of his two prisoners, flung aside within the house. Then he went composedly to the fireplace and took coals and brands from it. He spread them carefully all about the building.

Some places caught fire readily, others were not easy to set alight. Clothes and blankets helped to spread the fire. The place filled with such a volume of acrid smoke that he was coughing when he went outside.

He waited. Flames rose. They crackled. They purred. Then they roared. Once, Jim shifted the queer cap of iron wire on his head. Very slightly and very cautiously.

He smiled with burning eyes. He stood outside a window and looked in. There was not so much smoke inside the house now but flames were everywhere. The heat was almost unbearable, but he stared in hungrily. In the ceiling of the main room there was a little hatch, with a ladder going up the sidewall to it. Sally had fainted once after coming down that ladder. The Little Fella had been very greedy.

Then he saw the Little Fella. He had not seen it teetering in frantic indecision at the edge of the hatchway. He had not even seen it trying dreadfully to use its almost useless limbs to climb down the ladder.

What he did see was a roundish, pinkish, hairless ball, nearly without features, which fell out of the smoke-cloud at the ceiling and plopped on the floor. It bounced once and lay quivering.

Then it struggled desperately up. It was encircled by flames. It scuttled horribly here and there, screaming soundlessly. Every way of exit was barred by flames. It retreated, shaking, shriveling, flinging itself crazily about.

Jim watched.

He felt no faintest impulse to mercy, but he was not ill-pleased when a partition fell. Incandescent joists and burning embers covered the place where the Thing had stood at bay amidst the flames. It seemed to Jim that the fallen stuff quivered a little, as if something moved convulsively beneath it, and he imagined that even through the protection of his iron-wire cap there came a sensation like a noiseless, long-continued shriek.

But it ended.

Jim Hunt went composedly away into the hills. He had a gun and some ammunition. He had food. Rather more important in his own eyes, though, was the fact that he had tablet-paper and a soiled stamped envelope and a pencil.

A letter to Security, dropped in a rural mailbox, could be made demonstrably convincing that he, Jim Hunt, had survived a fifteen-thousand-foot drop and was hidden somewhere in these hills. And he could explain that the people of this area were thin and anaemic and bloodless, and that the cause would be found to be thought transmitters hidden in the attics of their homes. But those transmitters could be nullified by iron-wire caps for Security agents.

Again the defeat of the Things who enslaved humans and fed upon them seemed very simple and quite easy and very sure.

It wasn't.

CHAPTER VII

Spread of Power

THE thoughts which raced through the bright sunshine were shaken and raging and terrified. A completely unparalleled disaster had happened. One of those who sent thoughts flickering about the hills had been killed—forcibly, violently, horribly killed. Such a thing had not happened before in a thousand years! Panic filled the thoughts of the survivors.

Each one had shared the screaming terror of their fellow as he realized that none of

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his subject animals—on this planet called *men*—would come to carry him to safety even at the cost of their own lives. Each had partaken of his crazy indecision as he looked down into the room which was a sea of flames below him.

And when the flames licked him, and when his hide shriveled and scorched, the Things in other soft warm nests here and there in the mountains, felt their own hairless hides turn crisp and shrivel, and knew all the torment that Thing had known. They could shut out each other's ordinary thoughts, but not the silent, pain-mad shrieks of the dying creature.

So that now it was over the thoughts that raced through the bright sunshine were raging and terrified. Some seemed frightened into incoherence. Some seemed temporarily mad. All had lost the zestful complacency and the placid absorption in their gluttony which had been the portion of their race for ages. Some even clamored for a return to their former home in the craft which had brought them here.

But that was plainly impossible. There were very, very, very many more than had landed. All could not crowd into the craft which had brought the original colonizers. And of course if men were included in the complement, to work the machines and feed the crew—why—not a fraction of their number could depart.

There were rangings and accusations and counter-accusations. A man — a domestic animal—had been able to defy transmitted thought. A man—a source of food—had brought about the death of one of their number. He was still at large. He was still unsubdued. When a dozen of them concentrated their thought upon him, each had felt full assurance that their thoughts were absorbed in his brain. They had been absorbed! But without effect.

THERE came an icy, cold thought in the sunshine. Perhaps it was not a man who defied them but a member of another non-human race, from another world still, who roved this planet and was immune to their power. If that were so, he must be destroyed.

Every human under their control must search for this creature. If he could be captured by men that must be done. And he must be handled very cautiously. He could be forced to reveal what he knew of other races able to travel from world to world.

Their own race had once been masters of one planet only, long eons ago. When a space-ship of another race landed on it, the members of the space-ship's crew were overwhelmed by the thoughts of the Things. But their ancestors had not been—the thought was savage—foolishly gluttonous.

They had controlled the newcomers, and the newcomers took them back to their own planet, and now the race which roamed the stars was subject to the race which could transmit its thoughts. No, here was a new world for them, with an infinitude of subjects to serve and nourish them. With caution, all would go well. But this single immune must be caught and the degree of danger he represented learned.

The icy thoughts went on. Some still raged and some still seemed to gibber incoherently from the shock of the death of their fellow and the manner of it. But others concentrated their thoughts upon the men under their control. They commanded an intense man-hunt.

It was beginning when night fell. It continued through the night. It went on through the forenoon, with weakened humans collapsing from the demands upon their strength beyond the normal requirements of their masters.

But near midday there came a triumphant icy thought again. The problem was solved! The fugitive had written a letter and put it in a box to be gathered up and taken where he wished it to go. It was directed to be taken to that entity known as Security. It had been opened by a man under control, according to his orders. And according to his orders he had communicated it to the thinker of icy thoughts.

The fugitive was a man, no different from other men. He had experimented with the sending of thoughts and had been condemned to imprisonment. He had escaped, and understood the subjugation of the people about him. He had tried to send this information to the entity called Security but it was safely intercepted. Security would not receive it.

The manhunt must go on. If he were killed it did not matter, now. But—the icy thought was suddenly insanely hateful—if he could be left unsubjugated while he was killed very, very slowly, it would be more adequate revenge for his insolence in daring to kill one of Them. . . .

Morning again. Men on watch at every

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bridge. Men patrolling every highway. Baying bloodhounds in the hills, trailing a man who had killed a girl whose parents had befriended him—so the story ran—and then when her family left their house to attend her funeral, had robbed that house and wantonly set it on fire to burn to the ground.

Fury went over the countryside wherever men repeated the story to each other. The Things made them believe it, of course, but they thought it their own conviction. Rage filled every human being. Bitter yammering hate of a man known only as "Jim"—Sally's father told so much—and who was described as thus-and-so in appearance and who wore a foolish cap made of iron wire.

Maybe he was a lunatic. The cap seemed to indicate it. Sane men didn't wear caps of iron wire. It was illogical and monstrous and immoral to wear caps made of iron wire.

IF A man wore a cap made of iron wire, though he were your father or husband or brother, he should be seized at any cost and taken at once to Clearfield. No man should wear caps of iron wire.

Throughout all the mountains the conviction spread with the speed of flickering thought that no man should ever wear iron wire anywhere about his head. It was the one illogical item in the consciousness of the folk who searched ragingly for Jim.

But small round hairless things sent out that thought as persistenly as they drove the domestic animals called men upon the quest for him. They could give commands and impose thoughts at any distance upon their slaves. But men could not report back to the Things except by human speech.

That was the principal drawback to the search—that and the fact that only a verbal description of Jim was available. No Little Fella knew what Jim looked like, save for the description given by Sally's father and her two gangling brothers and the other description given by two men who had been left bound with caps of iron wire upon their heads.

Those two men were dead. They had not protected the Thing that Jim destroyed so terribly. They had not obeyed Its orders. They had allowed themselves to be knocked unconscious and bound and—via the caps—to be made incapable to serve and protect their master. So they were dead.

But all the skill and wisdom of men and Things was directed to the quest for Jim. The Things sent thoughts to guide the search and keep it at fever heat. Men were told to hate him and they hated. They were told that he was a monster of criminality and they believed it. They searched and searched with unflagging zeal though the bodies of many of them were overthin and weakened by their masters' other demands upon their strength.

Fresh men arrived to join in the search. They came in heavy lumbering buses, which discharged their loads first in Clearfield. They continued to arrive as the morning wore on to midday—sometimes one busload at a time, sometimes a fleet of three or four. Human headquarters were set up in the village.

Then couriers were needed and presently motorcyclists roared into the village, wearing police uniform. All were raging. All were filled with bitter hate. All were passionately convinced that any man who wore a cap of iron upon his head was somehow sub-human, somehow monstrous, somehow an individual to hate with a poisonous loathing.

Jim Hunt watched the arrival of these outside reinforcements for the hunt with, at first, a blank amazement. He began to suspect the truth only when a fleet of six huge inter-urban buses lumbered down a dirt road on the way to Clearfield and he saw them from the brushwood beside the highway. Every bus was jammed with men—civilians all.

He saw their faces, and while he had not seen too many of the Little Fellas' subjects, he recognized a certain expression worn by every one. It meant that someone listened regularly to a soundless insinuating thought in his own mind, saying, "Nice. . . Nice. . . Everything is nice. . . Everyone is happy. . . ."

It meant that a look of unearthly tranquillity was a sign that its wearer served loathsome pinkish hairless monsters and was passionately convinced that he did so of his own will.

But busloads of them—hundreds of them! Maybe more than hundreds. . . commanding the services of fleets of buses at short notice . . . and uniformed motorcyclists who acted as couriers, showing that there were also official police who served the Little Fellas....

Jim found it hard to believe the sum when he added the facts together. They amounted to a certainty worse than he had suspected. Here in the mountains one could believe that

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the Little Fellas could seize a whole population without the outside world having the least inkling of the fact.

But these hordes of men of all conditions—Jim saw worn, exhausted figures among those to be glimpsed through the bus-windows—meant more than a rural population enslaved. Either a town of middling size was utterly subject to the Things or, at the least, a city was in process of being silently and insidiously conquered.

Sally's family had been subjugated instantly when neighbors came bringing Things cradled in their arms. The neighbors stayed one hour and went away again—and a Thing was nestled in a soft warm nest in the attic. Sally and all her family were joyously subject to him in their inmost thoughts.

The same thing could be done in a city. A party of friends might readily carry small round Things from one house to another. One family after another would be seized upon and each would instantly be very very glad that there was a Thing in some soft warm nest nearby, who told them that all the world was nice. . . nice. . . and that they wanted nothing more than to obey him in all things.

They would keep the secret of his existence with a desperate loyalty, and they would open their veins to satisfy his gluttony and feel a shivering ecstasy as they made the sacrifice.

EVEN a guest in such a household might feel a nibbling glow of contentment, and a desire to return often to a place where such a feeling of joy was to be found. Sooner or later he would find himself irresistibly sleepy.

A voice in his own mind would whisper, "nice. . . it is nice to doze off. . . just for an instant. . . ."—and he would sleep and wake up very happy indeed. Permanently happy, provided only that he was allowed to obey the Thing in the soft nest—so cute!—and share the subjection of the others in all things.

Yes, a city could be taken in that way. House by house, family by family, neighborhood by neighborhood. And if the Things were wise and understood the civilization of men they would surely make the leaders of the city their first subjects! The police, naturally—and the doctors too, of course!

Perhaps especially the doctors, because sometimes a Thing was less than wary and forgot caution in its gluttony. A human might faint or visibly be white and bloodless and exhausted though wearing a look of unearthly tranquillity. The doctors should be enslaved first of all.

Two more busloads of men went by to join in the search for Jim. It was then four in the afternoon. The Things were reckless in their need to capture him. He had defied them and they could not subjugate him. He had killed one of their number. They were mobilizing their slaves in overwhelming number to beat the mountainsides for him.

He knew their secret. He knew that such things were—and he did not adore them. At any cost he must be destroyed, though it meant the use of a mob numbering thousands, drawn from many miles away, and though it was hardly convincing that the murder of an unknown mountain girl and the burning of her parents' home should cause much stir except among her neighbors.

Even with the evidence of the busloads of men it was not easy to accept the implications of their presence. Such an army, mobilized so swiftly, implied a deeper horror and a greater danger than even he had been willing to sacrifice himself to defeat. And then came a creepy panic on top of all the rest.

He turned from the dusty roadside and plunged back into the woods. Far away he heard the baying of hounds. But it would take much time for them to unravel the confusing trail he'd left. He had a resource and now was the time to use it.

A hundred yards back a man lay on the ground. He had been one of those who searched for Jim. He'd been white and exhausted even at the beginning, because the Thing he served was greedy, too. But he'd been commanded to join the search and he'd obeyed.

He'd driven himself with ruthless resolution, spurred on by the fury he'd been commanded to feel. He'd gone to the limit of his strength and beyond it, using up every nonexistent ounce of energy, stumbling when he could not walk erect, staggering when his muscles would not obey his commanded will.

When he'd dropped it had been because there was no strength left in him. Jim had found him in a coma caused by something far beyond fatigue. The man was apt to die of exhaustion and it had been Jim's intention to carry him to the roadside and leave him in plain view—in the hope that sheer hu-

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manity might lead someone to pick him up.

Jim, though, could no longer practise humanitarianism. If he was the only living man who suspected the existence of the Things without being subject to them and, if their conquest had spread beyond the mountains as their mustered army showed—why, his own life had to be preserved until he could give warning.

He did not feel heroic. He felt, instead, a sickening scoundrel. But he stripped the barely-breathing, unconscious man. He donned that man's clothing.

He dressed the limp figure in the garments he had worn and that he knew would have been described to all who sought him. He dirtied the other's face and clothes with mud, as if he'd splashed through swamps and rivers in his flight. And then he added the final touch.

HE PUT a new cap of iron wire on his substitute's head and fastened it with a strand beneath the muddied chin. He took the other's headgear and put it on his own head. It hid the cap he still must wear or risk the subjugation of all of earth. And then, unhappily, he gauged his waiting-time by the sound of dogs baying urgently in the distance and dared to wait till dusk.

At dusk he went out into plain view on the dusty highway. He carried the limp figure he had hoped to help, but now would quite possibly destroy over his shoulder. He trudged along the highway's dusty length.

He had carried his burden almost a mile when he heard the soft turbine-purr of a bus behind him. He turned and waved. He pointed to the cap of iron wire on his victim's head.

That was enough. The bus stopped. Men dragged the muddy, unconscious figure within. Jim climbed aboard. No one asked him questions. Every man stared hatefully at the prisoner. There was such rage in their eyes that it semed a tangible thing. They had been commanded to hate a man who had murdered a girl and wore a cap of iron wire on his head.

A cap of iron wire—that had been commanded to be considered a greater crime than murder! It was loathesome beyond imagination! That kept every eye upon the feebly breathing prisoner while men panted hate of him.

When the bus reached Clearfield Jim got out with the others. There were only three people who could recognize him if they saw him, though he counted on two others who now were dead. But in the crowd he went unnoticed.

He waited. The limp figure went swiftly out of the bus. It went swiftly to the place appointed for it. It had an iron-wire cap on its head. It wore Jim Hunt's garments. It was unconscious, and could not be questioned. But identification was complete. Just after sundown the mob was told that the hunt was over.

Then, swiftly and smoothly and very promptly, the mobilization was reversed. Parked buses opened their doors to take on their loads of no-longer-raging men. Jim climbed into the first of them and took a place on the rear seat. The bus filled to suffocation. Its turbine purred, and it rolled softly and gingerly over the uneven highway in Clearfield, lurched cumbersomely on the narrow dirt-road beyond.

Presently it trundled down a ramp to a great trunk highway and picked up to its highest permitted speed. Jim leaned back against the end-wall and pulled his hat down over his eyes. He was very careful, though not to let his iron-wire cap show.

In half an hour the bus discharged its passengers in a city street. Early night grayed all the world. The passengers melted away in as many directions as there were men. There had been no talk on the bus. There was none now. The men scattered.

Jim went to a pay-visiphone booth. He put a coin in the slot and said curtly, "Security."

The screen lighted, and he saw the reception-desk, with a uniformed Security Police officer looking uninterestedly at him.

"Business?" said the screen without animation.

"Look!" said Jim. "Here's something I found. I—don't know whether it means anything, but. . . ."

He held out an object of which he had made several specimens, trying to arrive at one that would not be too uncomfortable for his own use. This, like the others, flattened out readily into a spiral disk of wire.

"It looks," said Jim, "as if it were meant to be a cap. A sort of cap made out of iron wire. I wondered. . . ."

Then he ceased to wonder. The face of the Security officer twisted with instant, commanded - reaction loathing. He reached quickly to press a button.

Jim got out of the visiphone booth in a

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hurry. Even so he was only a block and a half away when the patrols flashed into position from every direction and formed a cordon about all spaces within a block of the booth. Nobody would get through that cordon without positive identification and a precise account of why he was at that particular spot at that particular time. If he wore an iron-wire cap. . . .

Jim had barely slipped through. He went on hastily, like everybody else when a Security cordon was thrown about an area. But he felt deathly sick and much more lonely than he had believed a man could be.

The Things had control of Security too—at least here. If they had chosen to take over its very top levels, which was surely possible—if they controlled Security itself there could be no hope for mankind.

CHAPTER VIII

Airtight Trap

SECURITY, of course, had the final and overriding power among men and it differed from previous tyrannies only in degree. The sincere belief of its top men that they were essential to mankind's continued existence had only a little more reason behind it than the similar beliefs of previous dictatorships and empires.

Men had reached a stage of technical progress where they could destroy themselves and something like Security, to some degree, was needed. When it was a purely international affair and hardly operated below a national level it was probably an unmixed blessing. It certainly prevented a second atomic war and assuredly kept biological warfare from being tried out full-scale.

Even later it was essentially useful. It wouldn't be wise to allow high-school students to learn the principles of induced atomic detonation. Common table-salt contains a fissionable isotope and adolescents playing with atomic energy could be more destructive even than with fast cars and sport-planes.

Also it was necessary that cranks and crooks and lunatics should not be able to go into the nearest public library and find out just what a single individual can do in the way of damage with proper information and a minimum of apparatus. When Security managed only these things it was not too bad. But there is a boundary to the safe suppression of knowledge.

There is a point where risks have to be taken for progress. When Security extended its authority downward and prohibited all dangerous scientific experiments its underlings ruled automatically that anything which could be dangerous should be forbidden, that any experiment whose result was not certain could be dangerous.

Interplanetary flight could not be developed because any but one-way guided-missle flights meant a danger of bringing back alien and possibly deadly micro-organisms. Microbiology became merely an art of cataloguing observations because bacteria sometimes mutate under cultivation. Experimental medicine became pure science without application to human life.

All research involving nuclear fission was forbidden and physics came to a frustrated stop. Even electronics was suspect. When Jim Hunt essayed a daring excursion into the physical basis of consciousness the foreseeable perils of the subject made Security clamp down swiftly and firmly for the safety of mankind.

The official motive for Security decisions could not be challenged. Its motive was the safety of the race. Nobody outside of Security was allowed to learn enough to be able to challenge its methods.

The world as a whole tended to settle down into a comfortable stagnation, with due gratitude to Security for its continued life, and most people placidly confided in the protection they were not allowed to escape.

But this state of things was ideal for the purposes of the Things. Naturally enough, as parisites, they were not especially intelligent—certainly not compared to men. They were utterly uncreative. Essentially they were parisitic in exactly the fashion in which lice are parisitic, only with a highly specialized ability to implant desired thoughts into the consciousness of other organisms. That was all.

This odd power secured their survival, instead of small size and ability to hide which lice and fleas find so convenient. The Things thrived because they could make other creatures wish to serve them instead of killing them. They had a very considerable cunning and certainly they had the ability to learn a great deal about their hosts—or victims.

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But despite their success they were actually rather stupid.

THEY had exactly one desire—to be warm and comfortable and fed. That happy estate called for the enslavement of intelligent other creatures who would provide the warmth and comfort and food. Actually, the Things had only one technic and one trick but the combination was deadly.

The technic was the linkage of their thought-transmission power so that several could concentrate on an individual on whom they wished to prey. The trick was the use of slave-brains for contrivance.

When desire to serve the Things became a passion as sincere and unreasoning as patriotism their victims set joyously about the enslavement of their fellow-men. They schemed for it. They planned for it. They devised far reaching and beautifully-planned campaigns to bring it about.

And they had no qualms because, of course, everyone who was subject to the Things was very very happy. It showed on their faces. But of course a man in a state of inner exaltation was not so good a workman and there was a fine edge gone from his perceptions because he was lost in his contentment.

Also there were times when he was desperately weak because of the Thing's demands upon his strength. So where the Things held sway there was a slight slackening. Civilization seemed to falter just a little, in preparation for a quiet and contented descent into barbarism.

But when the service of the Things was the high point in one's life and they wanted only to be warm and lie soft and feed gluttonously—why, there was no point in striving for anything more.

But Jim Hunt was not yet reduced to slave's estate. And his freedom was the only thing the Little Fellas had to fear and about the only hope for yet-free humans to stay that way.

Long after nightfall he still roamed the streets of the city and racked his brains for a possible course of action. At any instant a deadly and desperate search for him could begin again. The unconscious man he'd turned over in Clearfield had been accepted as himself, to be sure. But if Sally's father looked at him, or a physician were ordered to restore him to consciousness. . . .

A doctor-slave would see tiny scars, fresh ones, which would prove that the man in the iron cap had been a duly submissive slave and could not possibly have been Jim. A blood-count would show weakness beyond exhaustion and its cause. Unless that man was simply murdered out of hand it was inevitable that he'd be found to be an unwitting impostor.

And when that was found out, of course, it would be guessed that Jim himself had turned him over. And that Jim had very quietly mingled with those who then gave up the hunt and had been carried out of danger when the summoned mob returned to its homes. And there was his call to the local Security office.

It had seemed a safe trick. Somebody might make such a call in all innocence. But no innocent man would have fled with such speed when the Security officer in the visiphone pressed an emergency-button. Only a man with a bad conscience would have suspected that the button would trace the visiphone call and order a cordon about it instantly.

So Jim should be in as bad a case as ever. If Jim's substitute had been unmasked, the odds were a hundred to one that he was already being hunted in this city. The police-force here was under the Things' control, and there was an infallible way to detect Jim. He wore an iron wire cap.

Already there would be a cordon about the town. No man could leave on any vehicle, ground or air, without removing his hat at least and probably not without a more detailed examination still. They'd know Jim had to get away quickly and that he'd guess it. So they'd try to trap him.

He couldn't stay in town without taking off his hat. By morning there would be an order that all men had to take off their hats in all public vehicles, in all stores and dwellings and places of business. It was absurdly simple!

If it were announced that the homicidal maniac who'd committed a crime of insensate violence and wanton horror in the mountains was now in the city the entire population would look for him. If it were announced that his mania commanded him to wear a cap of iron wire on his head even the children would challenge any man who kept his head covered!

So simple! People who were enslaved would seize him in a frenzy of hate. People

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who weren't would shrink in horror from the iron cap that proclaimed him a lunatic. And if he tried to explain no one would believe his story.

They'd fear him. Broadcasts and newscasts and published accounts would make him hunted everywhere. Within ten hours there would not be a city on the continent where he could find safety where he would be listened to!

IT WAS airtight. Even Jim's few friends would think him mad, now. News accounts of the murder he was accused of would take care of that! Simply by the accusation of murder and the necessary wire cap he had become a psychopath, a deranged criminal, whom absolutely nobody on earth would listen to. Logically, he would even seem to have gone mad as a result of his own experiments and to have proved the wisdom of Security in forbidding them!

In this completely hopeless reasoning, however, Jim had made an advance. Until now he had believed in horrors when they were proved to exist. But now, abruptly, he thought ahead. For the first time he anticipated future troubles.

Slouching and without hope, he passed a small music-shop in which a visiphone operated discreetly for the attraction of passersby to its ware. He heard a broadcast voice.

". . . Is believed to be in this city. Without alarming the public the police give information that a man seen wearing an iron-wire cap is apt to be a homicidal maniac and likely to commit a murder at any time without provocation.

"It is suggested"—Here the newscaster's face wore a reassuring smile—"that every man in the city go hatless tomorrow, and that all citizens beware of any person who approaches them with his head covered. If you stay away from any man who can be wearing an iron-wire cap you will be quite safe."

Jim moved on. It wasn't a shock. He'd guessed ahead. It didn't even increase his feeling that absolutely nothing could be done. The only way to convince anybody who wasn't already enslaved, he reflected with surpassing bitterness, would be to show them.

Then he stopped short, there in the shadowy street with tall dark buildings on every hand. He was unshaven and shabby and in ill-fitting clothes. He had been condemned to life imprisonment and had escaped and was now a hunted animal. Any other human being who saw him tomorrow would scream with terror if he drew near them with his hat on, would scream more horribly still if he took off his hat.

But the despair suddenly left his face. His expression grew drawn and taut and intense. After a moment he moved on, but his eyes roved now, seeking what he knew he must have.

An hour later he idled down a very narrow street in the oldest and dingiest part of the city. The shops here were cheap and shoddy. Their interiors were dark. There was a vague smell of mustiness from the very buildings.

He'd passed the shop once, walking briskly, and again, walking with the listless gait of one whose thing was very greedy. This third time he slipped into the vestibule. He broke the narrowest panel of the shop's plate-glass. There was a trick to doing it without noise, and he used it. In seconds he was inside the shop, ransacking it feverishly.

He went out of the window with a heavy bag in his hands. The bag contained saleable loot—purses, handbags, silk scarves and the like. It contained a wax display-head, on which mannish hats were set to show how fetchingly they would make a wearer look. And he had a lot of assorted scissors.

AN ENTERPRISING thief would have realized money on the lot. But Jim carried it three blocks and turned into an alley—this was a very old part of the city, built before the Second World War—and crouched down in an alcove between buildings.

He had spotted this place, too. There was a storm-sewer grating there. He carefully thrust all his loot, piece by piece, into the opening. He thrust the bag through. Then he smashed the waxen head and put every scrap of wax deep down out of sight.

With an obvious looting of the store for marketable goods the theft of the wax head might not be noticed. He'd shifted the remaining display-heads, too, to hide the fact that one was missing. Absorbed in the loss of merchandise, the proprietor of the shop might not notice for days or weeks that a window-dummy was gone.

An hour later, his face grayed with whitish dust rubbed off on his hands from a white-

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washed wall, Jim Hunt stumbled into a starting-place for busses. One of the smaller vehicles was just warming up, getting ready to leave on a route which included Clearfield.

Jim stumbled wearily into it. He was the only passenger so far. He paid his fare. The conductor said shortly:

"Hat!"

He pointed to a new sign in the bus's interior which read—ALL MEN'S HATS MUST BE REMOVED.

Jim numbly took off his hat. He visibly did not wear an iron-wire cap. He looked drawn and gray and exhausted. He went with dragging footsteps to the very back of the bus and sank down in a seat.

A little later the bus rolled out. It had two other passengers then, no more. It purred through the city streets. It was stopped once at the edge of town. The driver spoke curtly to a uniformed man, who peered within. The uniformed man glanced at the passengers.

A fat woman, and a bald-headed man, and Jim, seemingly comatose from weariness, in the back. One of the bus's lights shone on Jim's uncovered head. The policeman was satisfied. The bus rolled on and out into open country.

Jim continued to look half-dead and wearied. Actually he felt almost incredulous at his escape. A wig from a fashion-dummy, caught over his iron-wire cap and unskillfully trimmed to blend with his own hair, had not seemed promising, but it was the only trick he could even try.

Still, it was not likely that anyone would look for the fugitive who'd been hunted so desperately in the mountain country to head back for that very area when he made a break out of the city.

From his own standpoint, though, he could have no other destination. Anywhere in the world, his unsupported tale would be considered the raving of a lunatic. Now that he'd been accused of murder—even Security would think he'd simply gone mad—unless the Things controlled Security. There was just one possible action for Jim to take.

He had to kidnap a Thing and get away with it to where free men could be persuaded to examine it and credit the fact and meaning of its existence.

CHAPTER IX

Fate in Balance

WHEN the bus let him out on what seemed mere empty country road, some ten miles short of Clearfield, he found it hard to believe. When the vehicle went purring away into the night he felt so terrific a letdown that, for a moment or two, he was as weak as he'd pretended to be.

Until the very last second he'd been afraid of some such absurd accident as his wig falling off, or the bus suddenly arriving at a place where forewarned men would be waiting to receive him as the object of their search.

But nothing happened. He was alone. Katydids sang in the darkness. Frogs croaked somewhere in the night nearby. A whippoorwill senselessly and monotonously repeated its refrain. There was a soft rustling of tree-branches. Once he saw a moving

[*Turn page*]

Tired Kidneys Often Bring Sleepless Nights

Doctors say your kidneys contain 15 miles of tiny tubes or filters which help to purify the blood and keep you healthy. When they get tired and don't work right in the daytime, many people have to get up nights. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder. Don't neglect this condition and lose valuable, restful sleep.

When disorder of kidney function permits poisonous matter to remain in your blood, it may also cause nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness.

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, a stimulant diuretic, used successfully by millions for over 50 years. Doan's give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills. *(Adv.)*

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light and panic filled him. It was a firefly.

He stepped across a shallow ditch in the starlight and worked his way into a wood. He blundered through it until he felt open space before him and an iron-wire fence such as seemed to be used here either as boundary-markers or to restrain unusually docile cattle.

Here was a clearing. He followed its edge around to the other side because, at the edge, the ground would not be ploughed and would show no tracks. He went farther and farther from the highway.

He found himself wading through knee-deep fallen leaves, gathered in a hollow by some vagary of air-currents. He was very very tired and numb in his mind. He lay down and prepared to sleep—and his wire cap shifted on his head. He started wide awake, cold all over.

He'd modified the design of his wire cap, of course, so that it stayed more or less firmly on his head without a wire-strand under his chin to hold it on, but it would not be safe to sleep that way! He'd almost gone to sleep without fastening the cap so it couldn't be dislodged while he slumbered.

He fixed it but the near-lapse frightened him. He lay awake in the darkness, listening to the tiny small sounds of the night. And this shock of fear had an odd effect. It suddenly occurred to him that not only the story he had to tell but all his actions were those of a madman.

He had seen one Little Fella, one Thing. It was a preposterous, roundish, pinkish ball that bounced when it fell, and then quivered as flames licked at it.

But his memory could be a delusion.

He could be insane! He had experimented with thought-amplification, and it was desperately dangerous. Security was quite right there! It was quite possible that, in his basement laboratory with its quarter-inch steel walls, his brain had been affected by the thought-fields he had made.

The infinitely delicate organization of his memories and his perceptions could have been disarranged. Neurones could have become distorted in function because they were subjected to the stresses his fumbling apparatus had produced. Perhaps he had committed the crimes of which he was accused! Combined delusions and memory-lapses would account for everything.

He had been under a ghastly strain of panic and of horror. He was poisoned with fatigue. He felt an impulse to tear off the iron-wire cap and find out once and for all whether he was mad or not.

Sleep came suddenly at long last and then he slept heavily. Only toward morning did he dream. Then he was lecturing lucidly to that eminent person, Doctor Phineas Oberon, the Security Director of Psychological Precautions. Doctor Oberon sat fatly back in his chair and listened with the complacency of the third-rate man in a position of authority.

"It's perfectly simple!" Jim was saying exasperatedly. "Consciousness isn't a radiation. It's a field of force! In effect, a static field! In our brains it governs the degree and distribution of excitation of the neurones!

"We simply haven't had the instruments with which to examine such fields in detail before! I've made them! You can check the theory and try them out! And there's a generator of the field that can be hooked onto the scanning instrument—the modulator—and make the same field all over again with greater intensity! It's so simple!"

"My dear young man," said Doctor Oberon complacently, in Jim's dream, "your proposal is illegal. Section Four, Part Three, paragraph C of the Security code as amended reads, 'The amplification of the physical factors involved in thought, awareness, perception, apperception, reason, knowledge, memory, or any of the phenomena included in animal or human consciousness is forbidden save in official Security experimental zones and under first-priority supervision.' The violation of this provision is a first-degree offense against Security."

"Confound it," cried Jim shrilly in his dream. "It's got to be done! It's—look! We make electricity in our bodies but electric eels do it more strongly. We make thought-fields in our brains, and these Things do it more powerfully. But just as we can electrocute an electric eel with a dynamo, despite its power, we can handle the Things."

"It would be quite illegal," said Doctor Oberon with finality. "And you are disqualified for consideration for experimental work in any case because of your conviction of a breach of Security."

"But man!" cried Jim in the impassioned urgency of dreams. "Don't you realize? All that's needed. . . ."

Then he opened his eyes and he was half-covered with fallen leaves and it was broad daylight. Birds were singing and he was very hungry.

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HE STOOD up slowly. In his dream he had known exactly what needed to be done to destroy the power of the Things at one stroke but he couldn't remember it now that he was awake. He puzzled over it a little. Of course, in dreams we all have marvelously brilliant thoughts, which usually turn out not to be so brilliant when we examine them in daylight.

But this had been unusually convincing. It semed to have been completely logical and completely reasoned out. In the dream he'd known not only why he was urging that something specific be done, but how it would work and what its effect would be. But it was all gone now.

After a moment he shrugged. He was one man against Security, and the Things and all the slaves of the Things and everybody who believed the perfectly reasonable things that both the Things' slaves and Security had to say. The tale he had to tell was so preposterous that he'd doubted it himself. There was only one way to make anybody even begin to believe it and that way wouldn't be easy.

But he literally couldn't stop. He couldn't surrender. He couldn't make terms. He could blow his head off with the pistol he'd taken from a man he'd first intended to help and then turned over in his own place, or he could find a good deep pond and jump into it. There was no other way to end the hunt for him. But since he was finished anyhow, he might as well play it out.

He searched for a wire fence. It took him a long time to find a single-strand one. He came upon a hog-lot with a low woven fence about it, and took warning from it. He moved more cautiously after that. It was an hour before he found what he wanted—one of those single-wire barriers that formally marked off a boundary in woodland and perhaps served to hold back cattle or horses from wandering. He broke the wire and set to work.

He was hungry and it annoyed him to be bothered by hunger when his life could be measured in hours at most. It bothered him, too, that he had to make something out of wire with no tools but his hands and that he could afford to take no chances at all—that it must be unqualifiedly right.

He had the job halfway done when he saw a fatal flaw in the design. He had to start all over again. It had been late morning when he began. Noon came and he was irritatingly ravenous but he forced himself to work with painstaking precision. He could not cut the wire save by repeated bendings until it broke.

His hands grew raw. Blisters formed and broke. His fingers bled. He kept on doggedly. When at long last it was finished, with loose ends devised so he could twist them together and fasten it and nothing short of pliers would ever loosen it again, he went to a small stream and drank heavily.

Then he rested, looking rather grimly at his hands. He remembered, too, and used a still spot in the stream for a mirror, to see how convincing his wig might be. It was not too good. He trimmed it a little more and twisted odd strands of the hair under his iron-wire cap for still greater security against its slipping off.

Again he had to wait for dusk. It would make his story less likely but he did not dare to risk close inspection. There were some factors in his favor but this was a late hour at which to appear. He had to wait for dark so his wig wouldn't be looked at too closely.

He retraced his steps to the clearing he'd circled the night before. There was a farmhouse close by the main highway. He watched it for a long time. It was a prosperous farm, for mountain country and poor land. The house itself was trim and neat and newly painted, and the barn was large.

There were a flower-garden and a small building that could only be a garage. Decidedly this was a prosperous place. If there were a Thing here—and there must be—within half an hour of darkness his fate and probably that of the world would be decided.

The sun sank with an agonizing slowness but, as dusk drew near, Jim moved cautiously along the edge of the clearing toward the farm-buildings. There were mountains all about him—great mounds of forest-clad stone, here and there broken by precipices of naked rock. There was a vast, serene dignity in the hills.

Men had subdued their lower slopes, to be sure, but the mountains stood aloof from men's petty doings. Still, their dignity would become scorn should men become subject to loathsome, shapeless, alien Things, who lay soft in warm nests and commanded humans to be their slaves and satisfy their gluttony.

Jim, however, thought no such abstract ideas. He clung to the object he had made and felt the smarting of his hands, which were caked with dried blood, and knew a

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monstrously irritating hunger. When dusk began to fall he risked much to creep out into the orchard and gather a dozen wind-fallen apples. He wolfed them, rotten spots and all.

Then night came, quietly and with brooding peacefulness. There was the sunset hush. There were all the minute, soothing sounds of ending day. Birds made drowsy noises and chickens cackled as they were fed in the farmyard.

Jim took off his coat and wrapped it with vast care about the object he had made. It had to be done just so—to give an effect of enormous solicitude and yet to be uncoverable instantly and used without the fraction of a second's delay.

He began to stumble toward the house with the air of a man at the very limit of his strength. He looked drugged and dazed by weakness and fatigue, and yet blindly obeying an implanted instinct of faithfulness. He seemed to be carrying a heavy object—though the thing he had made was not heavy at all—with all the tender and protective care one would give to a human baby.

CHAPTER 7

Second Blood

IT WAS early night. Lantern-light streamed out of an open door in the barn. He stumbled to the light and stood there blinking, the coat-wrapped bundle cradled tenderly in his arms. He made his face seem to work with exhaustion and his breath to come in gasps.

"Listen!" he panted. "You—you got a Little Fella here? I got to show him somethin'! I—I. . . ."

The farmer was an oldish man with an expression of vast patience—and, of course, unearthly peace. He was milking a cow. He looked around slowly with the manner of a man to whom any exertion at all is enormously difficult.

"What's that?"

"I was with gang—huntin' that fella," panted Jim. He seemed to sob with exhaustion. "I wasn't—strong. I—caved in. Couldn't do what my Little Fella told me! Couldn't! I fell down an' couldn't get up . . . Passed out . . . Fainted, I guess.

"When I come to I was lost . . . Tried to find the gang . . . Found a dead fella lyin' on the ground. He'd been carryin' this Little Fella. . . ."

A flicker of emotion passed over the lined, thin, patient face of the man on the milking-stool.

"Carryin' a Little Fella?"

"Yeah . . . The Little Fella's sick!" panted Jim as if in a frenzy. "He's—he's alive! I know that! But he—can't tell me nothin'. He just lays there. . . ."

He moved the coat-wrapped object.

"I don't know what to do!" he cried in seeming panic. "I picked him up an' wrapped him warm. I' been carryin' him ever since, tryin' to find somebody . . . Nobody but another Little Fella'll know what to do! Y'can't let a Little Fella die!"

The patient eyes looked at him wearily but without doubt. Jim's tale was so unheard-of that there could be no question of plausibility. And it called upon every commanded instinct of loyalty and devotion that the Things had infused into their victims.

"I was lost!" cried Jim again, desperately. "I couldn't get here no quicker! I'm from th' city! I don't know how to find my way around out here in the sticks! *Quick!* I got to take him to another Little Fella who'll tell me what to do!"

The farmer half-rose, then settled back again as if the exertion was too great.

"Ma'll show you where the Little Fella is," he said heavily. "Our folks are all off watchin' in case that killer's still around an' our Little Fella is mighty greedy. She'll tell you."

Jim turned and stumbled toward the house. A fierce hope stirred in him. An apology for weakness. Possibly only two people in the farm-house. But of course! The men who served the Things would reason that if Jim were a maniac as they'd been commanded to believe, he might have disguised a victim as himself only to stop all search so he might commit further crimes in the same area.

After all, the evidence that he was in the city was not conclusive—merely a cryptic telephone-call. So the search could still be going on up here in the hills while the city also was combed with exhaustive care.

And if the people of this house were still hunting him with only two humans left to serve and feed the Thing—why—they might be so enfeebled that he'd be allowed to go up

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to the Thing alone. Because the Thing was greedy. And that would make it unnecessary for him to kill these people.

He climbed heavily up the steps outside the kitchen. He stumbled inside. A woman sat there, her flesh almost transparent with bloodlessness. She opened her eyes.

"I—got to tell the Little Fella somethin'," said Jim in the same panting desperation. "Your husban' said you'd tell me."

Disloyalty and therefore danger to a Little Fella was unthinkable to a subject. The woman, with vast exertion, pointed out a narrow stairway to the attic. Jim bounded up it, carrying the coat-wrapped object as if it were heavy and infinitely precious.

The attic was dark and hot and still. There was a smell in it, subtly horrible to Jim's nostrils. It was not the healthy, lusty smell of an animal kin to man. It was somehow the pungent odor of filth.

AN INFINITESIMAL stirring somewhere —the almost noiseless movement of rags and cloth. Jim's hair tried to stand on end beneath the cap that kept him sane and free.

"The man outside," said Jim unsteadily, "told me to come up here to you."

The Things could not read men's minds. They could not even know of the nearness of a man save by their own senses. Men had to come to them and report the things the Little Fellas wished to know. But of course all men save one were slaves, so. . . .

Jim moved toward the sound. His flesh crawled all over. He knew that the Thing was commanding him to come close. The Thing would. And it could not tell that its commands were being absorbed by Jim's cap of wire instead of by his brain.

He fumbled his way toward the sound and it was at his feet. Maybe the Thing could see in the dark. He couldn't. And he couldn't delay and must act with the speed of thought —faster than the speed of thought. The Thing must not be able to send out even one flashing concept of alarm.

The match in his hand flared into flame. He had an instant's awareness of yellow-lit slanting rafters, of the attic, of a trunk or two and boxes of stored possessions—of the trimly-laid brick chimney going up to the roof. And there was a box at his feet. A quite ordinary packing-box, lined with soft and shredded rags. And in it. . . !

Jim thrust savagely downward with the object he had made, his coat flung away by the movement. He knew an instant of the most unholy fear that any man ever experienced, when the mouth of the woven-wire trap seemed to catch on something soft and hideously yielding. He thought he'd missed.

But then he flung down his whole weight and felt the trap shake and quiver with the violent struggles of the Thing inside it. He worked desperately, with cold sweat pouring out all over his body, until the Thing was fastened in.

When it was done he felt a horrible nausea. Of course, if iron wire closely spaced could keep out the transmitted thought of even groups of Things with their minds linked together, it should keep in the transmitted thought of a single one.

And this Thing was in a cage of closely-woven wire with a cover which Jim had fastened tightly with savage twistings of the wire-ends left for the purpose. It moved about in a beastly raging panic. The cage quivered with its strugglings. And Jim sweated all over as he struck a second match to make assurance doubly sure.

He could make out the nearly shapeless blob within the wire. He examined the fastenings and twisted them more fiercely still, and then twisted even the twistings together. Once his fingers came close to the woven wire, and tiny fangs lashed out and blood dripped from his finger.

But that—like the frenzied battling of a cornered rat—somehow reassured him. The Thing had not uttered a sound. Perhaps it could not. But the oozing blood-drops made him feel a normal human superiority.

"You understand talk," he said softly. "Now remember this! I've got a pistol. None of your friends can control me! And if I'm stopped by their slaves the first thing I'm going to do is put a bullet through this cage I've got you in!

"Picture that, my friend! A bullet through that beastly body of yours! So if you managed to tell your friends of the fix you're in before this cage closed on you—why, that's what is going to happen to you for reward!"

His clothes felt clammy from his past fear but now he felt a curious certainty of escape.

He picked up the cage and draped his coat about it again in the dark. He fumbled his way back to the narrow stairway, guided by the faint glow that came from it. He went

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downstairs and when he came out into the kitchen he carried the cage with its ghastly occupant as if it were something very precious, to be guarded with an anxious tender care. He remembered to speak with the same exhausted urgency—even greater urgency, now.

"The—Little Fella upstairs says I got to take—him to Clearfield—quick!" panted Jim. "Where c'n I get a car?"

The ghostlike woman sitting in the kitchen nodded weakly toward the door.

"Y'mean ask y' husband?"

But Jim did not wait for an answer. He stumbled hastily out, with the same enormous pretended solicitude for the object in his arms.

THE man in the barn looked heavily up at him.

"I—got to take the Little Fella to Clearfield. "Your Little Fella told me. A car. . . ."

The patient eyes turned meditative. Then the farmer spoke heavily.

"He just—fed. He don't bother much then. I guess that's why he didn't tell me. But if he told you. . . ."

He summoned strength. He stood up. He could barely walk but he led the way with the lantern to the small building Jim had suspected was a garage.

"Car's inside," said the patient man with uncomplaining grimness. "Here's the keys. I—hoped he'd tell you to stay here. There's only Ma an' me an'—he's greedy. I don't guess we'll last till the folks get back."

Jim clamped his lips tightly on reassurance. He took the keys and unlocked the garage. The car was a small fuel-oil-turbine job, easy to run. He put his package—which quivered a little—on the seat beside the driver's. He got in and backed out of the garage.

"Which way's Clearfield?" he demanded feverishly.

The farmer said tiredly;

"Turn right an' follow the road. Don't take the left-hand fork you'll come to 'bout a mile down. That leads upstate. Go straight ahead."

"Right!" said Jim. He let his voice crack, as if frantic with anxiety over a helpless and presumably unconscious Little Fella.

He put his foot heavily on the throttle. The little car leaped ahead. He drove swiftly out to the highway where the bus from town had dumped him. He turned right. But he didn't drive straight on when he came to the left-hand fork. He took that. He headed upstate.

Miles away, he spoke conversationally to the quivering Thing in the iron-wire cage beside him—the Thing that had lain so long in a soft warm nest and lived on the life of subject humans.

"You beasts are stupid. You'd only two humans to feed on so you weakened them until they could hardly walk and couldn't think straight at all! That's why I got away with this! If you weren't so beastly greedy you might have had a chance. . . ."

He spoke partly to reassure himself. He clung to the thought that the man and woman who had barely been able to totter about and who had expected to die to gratify the Thing's gluttony—he clung to the thought that they mightn't die now.

It would be a long time before they went up to the attic without being summoned—maybe days. With no commands imposed on them, with no greedy drain upon the fluid in their veins, they might gain some strength. Maybe, indeed, they'd be free of all servitude to any Little Fella at all for a while.

But that was too much to hope. And his own task had just begun.

CHAPTER XI

Companion

WHEN the sun rolled up as an angry red ball next morning Jim was two hundred miles away. In the first direct sun rays the grass and the tree-leaves and even the concrete roadways were wet and sparkling with dew. The webs of morning-spiders looked like jeweled veilings hung upon the bushes. The air was fresh and very fragrant.

But Jim had driven all night long, stopping only once to refuel the little car. He was very weary but he felt that he would never be able to sleep again. Still, with the coming of dawn it was wisest for him to hide. A glance into the rearview mirror, at daybreak, convinced him that daylight driving would be dangerous.

His clothes had been taken from another man, to begin with, and did not fit him properly. The wig he'd gotten from a dis-

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play-dummy did not match his hair by a half dozen shades and his wire cap was no such snug fit as he could have made with tools and a mirror to fit it by.

His head was not shaped right with the cap on it and the wig on top of that. He'd passed quick inspection in dim light but daylight driving was out of the question. He hunted for a hiding-place.

He drove along a broad, six-lane highway which seemed to stretch indefinitely before him through sheer forest. A single heavy truck hove in sight, moving in the opposite direction. Its aluminum hood and body glowed redly in the dawnlight. It hummed past him and dwindled to the rear. It was gone, and the road was empty again.

He saw a tiny woods-road, seemingly unused. It had been cut across by the highway and now it was growing up swiftly in saplings and underbrush. He was past it before he realized its perfection as a hiding-place. Then he braked.

It was his instinct to stop, and back up, and then drive into it. He was in the act of backing along the highway when the logical course occurred to him. He sighted carefully. If another vehicle came along now he could not risk it. But. . . .

He backed and swerved on the concrete to the most nearly perfect line he could manage. He backed off onto the grassy shoulder, holding the steering-wheel fixed. He backed in a long smooth curve to the exit of the disused road. He backed into it. He got out once to be sure of the way. He backed the little car completely out of sight from the highway.

The Thing quivered in its covered-over cage beside the driver's seat. Jim knew with savage satisfaction that it raged. Its iron-wire cage was not luxurious. The iron wires would be both cold and hard. They would be harsh and uneven. The Thing would be uncomfortable and it would be bewildered, too.

All during the night it must have been sending its instructions in a frantic rage, commanding its instant rescue. But the iron wires of the cage nullified all its efforts. Probably, in the end, the Thing had gone into a panic, far-fallen from the complacency of a creature who possessed domestic animals called men to serve it and on whom it fed—one who had lain softly in a padded nest stinking of its own beastly odor.

Jim inspected the cage with grim care. He saw little spots of dried foam where the Thing had tried to use its sharp mandibles on the iron to cut its way out. That sign of desperation pleased him. His eyes were cold and hard as he made very very sure that the Thing had been able to do no damage to the security of its cage.

He moved the cage to the trunk-space of the car. Inside there would be an extra barrier of iron to check the broadcast of its thoughts. When he drove on again, too, there would not be even the softening effect of a seat-cushion under the cage. It should suffer more of the discomfort it so hated.

HE LOCKED the trunk-space and separated the key from the driving-key which controlled the car. If anything should happen. . . . He went back toward the highway. He raised and set upright saplings that had been bent over by the car. Those that had been broken, he leaned toward the road.

If anyone examined the tracks outside minutely they could tell that the car had backed in. But most men would read the trail to the highway as that of a car which had come out of a disused wood-trail and onto the highway, instead of the other way about.

He returned to the driver's seat. He made sure that he had his looted pistol handy, ready to draw and use instantly. He settled back to try to rest during the daylight hours and, more especially, to plan his next move. He had tried to make plans during the night. His only conceivable hope, of course, was to use the captive Thing to persuade Security of the danger facing men.

Once Security was convinced the matter would be handled with inexorable efficiency. Wire-capped Security Police could land from patrol-ships near Clearfield. They could raid and search the farmhouses.

The slaves of the Things, of course, would resist in passionate loyalty to their obscene masters but a single Thing found slavering and raging in fury in its nest would prove Jim's report to the uttermost. And then. . . .

The rest of it would be grim business, naturally. They'd have to make terribly sure that no Things remained alive to make slaves of men. The Things' subjects would fight despairingly, in the impassioned belief that they fought of their own will.

But the Things could be destroyed, and then—sardonically—the tyranny of Security

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would be justified for all time because of the overwhelming peril from which it had saved humanity. Jim, himself, could hope for no reward.

The freedom of research for which he had fought would be gone forever.

He sat quietly in the car, weary and bitter but unable even to think of sleep while he waited for night to come again. He heard the humming of vehicles going past on the six-lane highway a hundred yards off. Traffic was begining to roll now that morning had come. In an hour there would be a continuous droning of turbine-motors along all the highway's length.

Now and again he heard small, abrupt rustlings in the dry stuff on the ground. Tiny hopping birds. Squirrels, perhaps. He heard insects and bird-songs.

He heard something else—sustained movements of something or someone moving along the overgrown woods-road. He tensed and put his hand very very quietly to the pistol in his pocket.

The movement stopped and Jim stayed motionless.

It was not a four-footed animal. It was human. It paused, surveying the car. Of course the car was motionless and looked deserted. But if this figure grew suspicious because he could tell that it had been backed into position—if he started to go away at a run. . . .

The rhythmic movement came closer. With infinite care Jim slid himself down toward the floor-boards. His pistol was in his hand now. If he had to shoot maybe the cars on the highway would think someone was taking a pot-shot at game out of season.

Hesitating, uncertain movements—then the figure came close. It peered into the car—and into the muzzle of Jim's revolver.

"If you make a noise," said Jim conversationally, "I'll kill you."

He meant it. His tone carried conviction. The eyes staring into his first blazed, and then focussed on the gun-barrel, and then stared back very savagely at Jim. Above those eyes, just under the hair-line, there was a long, knife-edged scar. Then a defiant voice spoke furiously.

"You'll have to shoot, my friend! If you damned slaves want to make sure why I'm immune to your blasted Little Fellows you'll have to try your tricks on my corpse! Go ahead and shoot or I'll break your dirty neck."

CHAPTER XII

Pool of Knowledge

JIM did sleep, after all. An hour after he'd been ready to blow out the brains of the man who'd come up to look in the hidden car, he lay slumped and slumbering in his seat while his new companion stood guard for the two of them. But Jim twitched a little as he slept from the effects of strain that could not yet be released. The jerkings and twitchings too were outward signs of dreaming.

In the dream his present waking companion was with him, and the two of them fled nightmarishly from pursuers some of whom carried Things in their arms. The rest were dead-white, stumbling human robots, any one of whom could be pushed over like a ninepin.

But they came by thousands and millions, feebly but with a terrible persistency. The two fugitives, it seemed to Jim, performed herculean feats and carried things which weighted them down but which they would not abandon.

Ever and again they reached some gray place in which it seemed they were safe and where they began desperately to put together the things they carried. But just as the object they planned to construct began to take form the white, stumbling figures of the slaves of the Things came shambling toward them from the darkness.

Then, in the dream, they seized their burdens and fled again because, of course, it was useless to try to fight off the bloodless hordes. And besides, there were the carried Things, who gnashed tiny sharp mandibles and drove on their cohorts with soundless shrieks of rage and blood-lust.

In the dream it seemed to Jim that he sobbed with fury as he fled.

"All we've got to do," he panted bitterly as they climbed a black precipice with a wave of weary robots climbing feebly but with blind persistence after them, "all we've got to do is set this thing up."

And then, halfway up the cliff, they saw a row of white faces looking down at them from the top. The Things and their slaves were waiting for them there.

Jim opened his eyes with a start. It was

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mid-afternoon. There was no sunlight. Heavy clouds overspread the sky. His companion was raising, by hand, the top of the car in preparation for coming rain. He nodded as Jim jerked his eyes about in instant weariness.

"You acted like your sleep wasn't too sweet," he said drily. "I sleep that way too, nowadays. I think we'll have a storm."

The first drops of rain fell as he spoke. He finished the job of raising the top. The patter of rain upon the forest roof rose to a clattering. Then there was a rushing sound, and the noise was a minor roar. The man with the scarred forehead climbed into the car as a downpour began.

"This," he said reflectively, "will wipe out the tracks of the car coming in here but it'll double the depth of those going out."

"I don't think it'll matter," said Jim. He added suddenly: "Twice I've dreamed that I had the answer to the Things. It was something to be made—to be put together. I was messing with thought transmission myself, you know. That's why Security sent me off for life custody.

"It seems to me that each time in my dream I was concerned with causing some effect, some interference with the thought-fields the Things make—something that would neutralize those thought-fields. I knew all about it in my dream and knew that it would work. But I can't remember it when I'm awake."

"I've worked out business problems in dreams," his companion said. "Sometimes the answers were faintly reasonable. Once or twice they were sound. Ninety-nine times in a hundred, though, they're sheer gibberish when you look at them in daylight."

Jim's companion was Miles Brandon. He had been to the city of the Things downstate on business. He found that some of his business associates were unwontedly pale and bloodless. One of them invited Brandon to stay at his home. All the family were pale and wore a strangely tranquil expression.

After the first night of his stay there, there was an abrupt change in the manner of the family, at breakfast. They seemed to assume that Brandon knew all about something he'd never heard of. It concerned a "Little Fellow" of whom his host spoke reverently. It became alarming when all the family stared at him bewilderedly because he asked what they were talking about.

But he was politely patient for a time, though they plainly expected him to do something remarkable before he sat down to breakfast—something connected with the Little Fellow. But when they stared at him and plaintively asked him why he didn't go to the Little Fellow, since the Little Fellow wanted him, he lost his temper.

A DOCTOR arrived—pale and bloodless like his host and with the same queer expression of tranquillity. He had been summoned for Brandon. Brandon, raging, started to leave. His host tried to keep him from leaving the house and the doctor insisted on giving him some injection that Brandon would not permit. It all seemed lunacy.

In the end Brandon had knocked down his host and brushed aside the argumentative doctor and stamped out of the house, fuming. He had breakfasted at a restaurant, registered at an hotel and sent a porter for his belongings.

Then, at his first business appointment for the day and while he still puzzled angrily over the host's behavior, the office door opened and a man in a white coat entered with four policemen. They tried to soothe and persuade him to come quietly with them to another doctor. It was preposterous. He went into a rage and knocked down the white-coated man. Then the police closed in.

He woke up in a strait-jacket. He was in the psychiatric ward of the local hospital and was an object of vast curiosity. Doctors and nurses—with tranquil faces—looked at him sympathetically. There was extraordinary contentment all about him.

Then he noted that some, who at one time looked a little pale but approximately normal, at another time would be white and utterly listless and incredibly weak. And they asked him questions that did not make sense. They gave him ridiculous tests. Ultimately they X-rayed him from head to foot.

That was the turning-point. He'd been in an automobile smash-up years before and his skull had been shattered. There was a metal plate supplying the place of a part of the skull-bone which had to be removed. The X-rays showed it. Then the doctors seemed to be satisfied. They told him that he would be operated on and a plastic plate substituted for the metal one.

They were very kindly. They sympathized with him. They explained why they wanted to make him normal like themselves. The

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Little Fellows wanted everybody to share the happiness they brought. And because people who didn't know anything about that happiness wouldn't understand, of course, nobody could be allowed to know until they did share it.

Miles Brandon had heard about it while that strange metal plate in his head kept him—so it was assumed—from being able to share it. He should have waked in his friend's house very very happy. When the plastic plate was substituted for the metal one he would be very very happy. Meanwhile, of course, he had been certified insane—so he wouldn't talk about the Little Fellows who wanted to make him happy like everybody else.

There had been a time in that strait-jacket when he'd doubted his own sanity, just as Jim had done. But he came to the lustily healthful conclusion that if he was insane he preferred to stay that way.

His escape was a combination of pure luck and cunning, close to the insanity he was accused of. He'd been at large for eight days, now, and he was half-starved and close to despair when he came upon what he thought was an abandoned car—probably a stolen one. He had counted on the car to get him to his home town, where certainly there would be no question of his sanity! He was a well-known citizen there. He belonged to all the leading organizations from the Country Club on down. He'd use every cent he owned to fight this.

Jim Hunt puzzled over the dream-certainty that something could be done which would prevent the spread of the Thing's dominion and end it where it existed. The rain drummed on the forest roof. Intermittent heavy splashings fell on the top of the car from branches overhead.

THE air became saturated with moisture and the ground became wet and little meandering tricklings of water ran here and there beneath the trees. The sound of the rain was enough to keep even the noise of traffic on the highway from being audible, though sometimes the whine of heavy truck-tires on wet pavement could be detected.

"I could do," said Brandon angrily, "with a couple of thick rare steaks and a mound of mashed potatoes and all the trimmings! But it's only a hundred and fifty miles to my home—when we get there. I shan't sleep until I've started some action against those Things! I know people in Security! I'll pull wires."

Jim's thoughts clicked. Not on the device that would end the danger of the Things. On something else.

"I'm just wondering," he said softly, "what your family thinks? Your business started eleven days ago. They haven't heard from you. They must have made some inquiry!"

"Surely!" said Brandon vengefully. "And no doubt they've been told that I've gone off my head! I've been warned not to take chances of getting hit on the head again. They'll be told the plate got dented and that pressure on my brain has to be relieved. But when I come driving up to the door."

"I wonder!" said Jim. "The story they've been told is pretty plausible. That danger did exist—of a blow on the head—for you. If they were told that you'd escaped while demented and were wandering at large they'd worry a great deal.

"But suppose you do turn up and explain indignantly that the doctors wanted to operate on you to make you the slave of Little Fellas? Little non-human creatures who hide in boiler-rooms and attics and intend to rule all of humanity? What will your family think then?"

"But man, it's true!" Brandon said indignantly. "And you'll bear me out!"

"Surely!" said Jim with quiet bitterness. "But I'm classed as a homicidal maniac with at least one murder to my credit, and it would be considered at best an eccentricity that I insist on wearing a wire cap on my head!

"Will your family believe that not very plausible tale of yours, backed by an implausible person like me, as against the very plausible statement of very reputable physicians explaining that there's a dent in the plate in your skull? For that matter, don't you sometimes suspect that it's the world that's sane and we're the crazy ones?"

Brandon ground his teeth. He was a big man. He had been beefy and he'd possessed all the self-confidence of a man who is an important citizen. But he had not won to that importance by stupidity. He saw. He looked as if he were about to roar in his frustration.

"There's the Thing in the cage in the car-trunk!" he said suddenly.

"Quite so," said Jim. "And the first thing any scientist on earth would do would be to get it out of the cage for examination. It

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would instantly get in touch with its fellows and they'd link their minds together for their common good. There's no distance-limit on thought! What then?"

Brandon pictured it. He and Jim had pooled their knowledge of the Things and, while Jim had gained only a little by the exchange, Brandon understood the implication of Jim's last question. He groaned.

"Then what can we do?" he demanded.

Jim stared out through the rain-swept windshield of the little car, parked in a disused woods-road while the day passed.

"I've got an idea," he said slowly. "It means getting some electrical stuff. I was sentenced to life custody for fooling with transmitted thought. I know a little about it. Maybe I can do something with certain parts.

"But we'll have to buy them. If we tried stealing them we'd never find what we want and we both need clothes and food. We need money. I think it would be most efficient if we lunatics staged a hold-up tonight. It looks to me as if it's necessary."

CHAPTER XIII

Trek With a Trunk

HIS reasoning was sound. It was wiser to get money and buy essentials than try to pilfer the essentials separately. So that night Jim, who had been a promising scientist once upon a time, and Brandon, who was a leading citizen in his own home town, held up a tavern just outside a little city.

They marched in with handkerchiefs over their faces, overawed four customers and the bartender and went out with the contents of the cash-register. They roared away to the southward in their car.

Half a mile away they stopped, splashed the car frantically with mud, Brandon adjusted the fuel-injector to be slightly out of phase, and they turned back and limped past the tavern they had robbed just as visiphoned police-cars arrived in a rush. They drove placidly on with their faltering motor as the squad-cars roared off in pursuit.

Then they readjusted the fuel-injector, went into the small town nearby and parked their car near a public visireceiver, tuned to the nearest station and paid for by advertisers on the visicasts so that nobody could escape their advertising campaigns even by leaving home.

The newscast that came on in minutes told briefly of a search continuing downstate for a homicidal maniac whose delusions caused him to wear an iron-wire cap upon his head. He was now charged with three murders and arson. The newscast did not speak of any search for Brandon. It did not mention that Jim was known to have possessed himself of a car.

The omissions might be intentional, to lull Jim and Brandon separately into a feeling of false security if they listened in. But Jim's feat of kidnapping a Thing and tricking a farmer and his wife into continued life and the loss of a car might simply not be known.

Certainly the junction of Jim and Brandon wasn't likely to have been suspected. It wasn't even likely that they were credited with the holdup of a few minutes since, or that they would be. This was two hundred and fifty miles from where Jim was hunted and far off the direct route to Brandon's home—which would be where he was looked for.

The two of them drove all night. They spent the early part of the next morning making Brandon presentable. Before noon he went out of their hiding-place, grandly hailed an inter-urban bus, and went into a town some seventy-five miles from the one in which he lived. Jim Hunt bit his nails in savage apprehension for hours. Brandon couldn't be forced to talk, of course, and no one would think to question him about Jim. But it was ticklish!

He came back shortly after three. He carried neatly-wrapped parcels and he looked half-sick.

"Clothes for you," he said. "I told them they were for my boy at school. Hope they fit you. A suit for myself. I didn't dare change in the shop. The things you listed from the electrical place. Said I had a youngster who liked to tinker with such stuff. The groceries. We can eat."

"Well?" Jim said.

"I called my home town," said Brandon very quietly. "I was afraid you were right, so I didn't call my home. I called one of my employees—not too bright but loyal. I told him I'd gotten into trouble down-state. I hinted at a woman and that the insanity story had been started to cover me up and had gotten out of hand. I said I'd ducked out

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before the man who wanted to get even with me could railroad me to an insane asylum.

"Well?" Jim said again.

"My family believes in the dented-metal-plate story," said Brandon bitterly. "They've been told my delusions in detail. There are police hidden in the house to grab me if I manage to slip back because I believe there are little non-human things who hide in boiler-rooms and attics and intend to enslave humanity!

"My employee mentioned them. He was suspicious until he'd referred to them and I made a show of being angry and asked him what the heck he was talking about! Now he thinks I got into trouble, pulled the insanity gag to get out and that it got out of my control."

Jim said, "And—"

"That's all," said Brandon. "He's going to try to resassure my wife privately that I'm not insane. I told him not to but he will! So"—his face was taut and gray—"I can't go home. If I did they'd not only get me but they'd take my wife along—all very plausibly. She'd insist on going."

JIM breathed more easily. "I was afraid you'd call your wife," he admitted, "and we'd be sunk. I've got a thousand-to-one chance I want to play before we take that Thing to Security. If I know Security officials they'll be inclined to turn the Thing over to somebody who'll let it out without precautions.

"While it's raising hades and starting a slave-empire of its own I'll be shipped off to life custody and my information will be referred through channels with the endorsement, 'Report made by certified homicidal maniac'. So nothing whatever will result. I'll try this trick first. Did you get the bandages?"

He changed his clothes. They ate voraciously. Brandon bandaged Jim's head and put one arm in a sling, which somehow automatically ended all likelihood of anyone suspecting him of wearing an iron cap. They drove off in broad daylight and, as they passed through a small town, Jim made a mental note of the license-plate number of a wrecked car in a garage. If he changed the plates on this car to that number it would add a little to their slender margin of safety.

A hundred miles away Brandon bought more electrial parts. They slept again in a side-road and took turns standing watch. This night Brandon spoke suddenly.

"That Thing in the car-trunk. You haven't fed it. Won't it die?"

"It's a blood-feeder," said Jim hardly. "Do you want to feed it? It won't die. Blood-feeders have to be able to fast long times between meals—like ticks and bedbugs. Ticks can go six months and bedbugs longer. I'm not worried about the health of the poor Little Fella just because he hasn't any human slaves!"

They had one more day's journey to the destination Jim had in mind. Toward nightfall of the next day he turned aside from any obviously useful highway and began to thread his way along an overgrown almost-obliterated road.

The little car forded streams. They went into wilderness which grew more and more pronounced. Once, they had to move a fallen tree-trunk out of the way. Just at sundown they came to a place where there were no trees or, where creeping vines grew over certain shapeless mounds upon the ground. The nature of the mounds was shown by a roofless, empty-windowed one-storey brick building in their midst.

"It's a sort of ghost town," said Jim without zest. "There used to be a lot of farming up here, but hydroponics and low transportation costs wiped it out. This was what they called a crossroads village. One summer when I was a kid my Scout troop camped here.

"It's fallen down a lot since then, but there"—he pointed to the brick shell—"that used to be the bank. The vault's still there. We'll need it. I give myself a week. If I don't get what I want by then I'll try the only thing that's left. But I haven't much hope of Security."

He loaded up to transfer their living apparatus to the place where they would sleep. But he left the Thing in the car-trunk. In its cage the Thing would neither be warm nor lie soft nor have anything on which to feed. But Jim could feel no concern. Early the next morning he set to work to try to destroy all the power of the Things without recourse to Security.

For materials he had some small gadgets bought in electric shops. For laboratory he would use the abandoned rusty vault of a bank which had closed down thirty years before and left its building to rot. For motive he had the future of the whole human race.

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CHAPTER XIV

Work Against Peril

THE reason for the vault was that Security had detectors of thought transmission and had believed that Jim was not the only experimenter and had hunted—perhaps still hunted—for the sources of the thought-fields its detectors could demonstrate but could not analyze. The suspicions of Security officials tended to fix themselves upon persons known to be interested in basic psychological problems.

Three professors of experimental psychology were arrested and the encephalographs seized by Security agents to distinguish themselves in the eyes of higher-ups by their zeal. A behavioristic-study laboratory was wrecked by Security police because of apparatus whose functioning was just cryptic enough to be included in high-level orders for the tracking-down of thought-transmission apparatus as dangerous to the public safety.

Jim's former friends in particular were cajoled and threatened and their possessions searched and their private papers examined for clues. Security had found Jim Hunt defying it—Jim Hunt was dead, of course—but the phenomena went on even after he was disposed of. So Security hunted for other experimenters who might be defying it.

But the Things who did transmit thoughts were not defying Security. They were ignoring it. They lay in warm nests and gorged themselves, and grew ever more bloated and obscene. They continued to divide and divide—and their greed increased as the change went on—and their numbers increased and ever more humans were subjugated to supply them with the means of gluttony.

Jim worked in the vault. It was of heavy steel, built solidly into steel-reinforced masonry, and its value as junk would not have begun to pay for the cost of taking it apart. In thirty years the building above it had rotted and the roof had collapsed but the massive concrete about the vault had kept its shape.

The great foot-thick combination door could not be closed now but the thinner inner doors remained. They were rust-pitted and bent but they could be shut so that, when Jim's apparatus was complete and in operation, no single trickle of its product could escape to alarm Security further.

He assembled the parts Brandon had bought for him. The transmitter itself would be relatively simple. Since a thought-field is more nearly like an electrostatic or a magnetic field than anything else its generation is not difficult. A magnetic field, for instance, can and does extend to infinity.

An electrostatic field does the same, save where it is nullified by some accidental Faraday Cage effect. But those fields cannot convey intelligence unless they are modulated. Unmodulated thought-fields are equally without effect—in fact they are not thought-fields, because thought *is* the modulation of a field. But in any case a transmitter, as such, was simple.

The tricky part of Jim's intended device was the modulator. It would have to receive thoughts, amplify them and impress their modulations with much greater power on the field the transmitter was to produce. And a mechanical device to receive thought is not easy to make.

Jim talked it out with Brandon as he worked. Brandon, of course, had no technical training. While he waited for Jim to succeed or fail he made rabbit-snares, found small fish in a trout-stream nearby and evolved grim schemes of his own.

Sometimes he talked of those schemes. They had to do with a one-man war he proposed against the Things, if Jim's attempts should fail. He knew that they loved warm places—attic spaces hard by chimneys, boiler-rooms and the like. He devised tricks for introducing deadly substances into those enclosures.

A favorite was a simple squib of gunpowder and powdered sulfur, which a furtive figure could toss into a room with its fuse lighted. It would flare suddenly into a strangling fog of sulfur-smoke in which no Thing could live. He could always tell when a Thing was present by the stench that surrounded it.

But he listened as Jim talked, as much to himself as to Brandon. Talking a thing out helps to clarify one's notions.

"The field acts like high-frequency current in a wire," he explained, vexed with himself because he could not phrase it simply. "It doesn't travel inside a wire, but on the surface—what's called the skin-effect of high-

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frequency conduction. A thought-field doesn't go into metal. It stays on the surface. Except iron. But it doesn't go into iron unless there's iron at the focus of the field."

He waved his hand exasperatedly as he fitted two small parts together.

"That sounds crazy—that focus business! A thought-field acts like a wave and it acts also like a solid particle and it probably isn't either. Like an electron, which has no position that can be fixed. There's only a probability of position.

"You can say that an electron is a wave-motion that's in phase with itself and is real only at one place but you can never know where that place is.

"You can say that a thought-field is a wave-motion that's in phase with itself at two places—where it originates and where it's focussed. In between you can know it exists but you can't tell where it's in phase with itself any more than you can tell where an electron is! Has that got any meaning in it at all?"

BRANDON smiled wrily.

"Darn little," he admitted.

"I'm saying you can prove there's a thought being transmitted, but you can't tell where from or where to," said Jim, irritably.

"Too bad!" said Brandon. "Security would have hunted up the first of these Things to turn up—wherever they came from—if they could have tracked it down. They insisted you were talking to your friends with your gadgets, didn't they?"

"They did," said Jim. "They were sweetly reasonable and told me that if I'd snitch on my supposed confederates the conditions of my imprisonment would be a lot easier. I'd have told on the Things, all right, if I'd known about them! In fact, if I'd been let alone a little while longer I'd have had something that would handle them!"

Brandon said nothing. They'd been at the ruins of the ghost-town for days and Jim was growing nerve-racked and jumpy as he seemed to get nowhere. His means for experimentation were so primitive as to be ludicrous. The transmitter was complete except for the modulator which would give it something to transmit.

The modulator would supply both the "message" and the directive which determined the second point where the message would be real. But Jim had not achieved a workable modulator which would duplicate the results he'd had before Security stepped in.

He was in the position of a man with a splendidly equipped radio station with no scanner or microphone to give the signal meaning. No matter how much power was put into the tubes no meaning could be had from its signal. Jim's transmitter would send thought but the instrument which would supply it with thought to send in a usable form would simply not function.

"There's nothing supernatural about the Things," said Jim, bitterly. "We send thoughts occasionally. Telepathy works sometimes—erratically, but past the possibility of chance. You might say that we transmit at low voltage—very low voltage.

"When conditions are just right something gets through. But the Things transmit at high voltage like electric eels." Then he added, "There's an illustration! We make electric currents in our brains. Encephalographs pick them up and record them. They're only minute fractions of a volt. Electric eels can make up to eight hundred volts.

"It's no higher quality electricity than ours, just as the Things' thinking is probably no better than ours if as good. It's just high-pressure. And we can elecrocute an electric eel if we want to by using a dynamo. We should be able to wrap these Things about their own beastly bellies by putting some power on the job. But. . . ."

He went grimly back to his task.

"Exactly what are you trying, then?" asked Brandon. "Put it in words of one syllable, won't you?"

"I'm trying," said Jim bitterly, "to beat them at their own game! I want to broadcast thoughts to the Things themselves! I want to tell them that they're the slaves of men! I want them to grovel like whipped puppies to the people they've ruled, before—before. . . ."

Brandon blinked at him.

"Before what?"

"Before," raged Jim, "they think of something I've thought of! There's a trick they can pull off to end everything—like that!" He snapped shaking fingers. "If it occurs to them, they can subjugate every living human being, probably us included, in seconds flat! They'll be invulnerable if they think of that trick before I can beat them."

Then, panting with fury, he went back to his work. But fury does not lead to clear

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thinking nor to meticulously accurate work with inadequate equipment. Jim worked on. His results. . . ?

There weren't any.

CHAPTER XV

Laboratory Work

DOMINION of the Things looked no otherwise than all the rest of the world. On parts of it the sun shone and on other parts the rain fell. Nowhere was there any sign of other human occupancy because the Things preferred to stay quietly and luxuriously in their nests. But a certain problem was developing.

The Things reproduced by the division of their bodies into two individuals. The frequency of that reproduction was strictly controlled by the abundance of nourishment. When a Thing divided, the food-supply became plainly inadequate. So each divided Thing called upon others, and they joined together with a human slave for each.

The process of distribution was adequate in a rural district for a while, but it was not enough when a city was absorbed. There were hundreds of thousands of humans to be subdued and ruled and preyed upon. The Things gorged themselves in such an ecstasy of feeding as perhaps the race had hardly known before.

They divided—and the abundance of domestic animals was such that one Thing had hardly become two before the two were gorged and already beginning the process of becoming four. The Things, in fact, multiplied with such incredible prolificity that there was no time—there was no space, there were no nests—in which to spread their spawning numbers.

Bickerings arose among them. Envenomed accusations and petty hatreds began. There was some danger that their crowding would actually produce physical discomfort for them! So they squabbled soundlessly, sending thoughts of hate to one another. But all, of course, still impressed upon the humans the thoughts of "nice . . . . nice . . . . nice . . . ." which kept their slaves exalted and submissive and perpetually conscious of an enormous happiness.

Then presently, an icy thought spread among them. It was cold and utterly factual. It was the thought of a Thing—such variants arose occasionally—who began to lose the frantic lustings of his own race and thought the more lucidly in consequence.

The icy thought said that now was the time for the Things to cease their foolish quarrel and coöperate so that they could quarrel in perfect freedom forever after. Six of them could control any animal, flooding its mind irresistibly with thoughts that blanked out its own consciousness. Even rage or fear or fury could not protect an animal against the linked minds of six of their race. Now they were numbered in thousands.

If every Thing linked its mind to every other there would be such a surge of energy as even their race had never used before. The whole race of man, the whole planet would become subject at one stroke. Then there would be no need for secrecy or caution or thought for the future because every human being would be passionately loyal to the superior race of Things.

And it would require only a single concerted effort.

The Things in their nests did not cease their feeding nor their quiverings of beastly enjoyment as they fed. But the squabblings lessened as the promise of the icy thought sank home. Unlimited gluttony. . . .

The Things gradually ceased their mutual venom for coöperation which would serve them all. Minds linked tentatively—and squabbled and broke the linkage and then linked again.

It would not work. The modulator, in the vault, simply would not pick up thoughts to enhance and impress upon the transmitter-field. Had Jim been less wrought up, less hag-ridden by a frantic feeling of urgency, he would have seen the completely simple reason for it.

But as it was he tested and retested his equipment and tried every possible rearrangement and was forced to the bitter conclusion that some small part that had been bought for the device was subject to a factory defect.

HE WAS made physically ill by the conclusion that nothing could be done. He looked at Brandon, the ashen taste of defeat in his mouth. He felt ashamed because he had taken nearly a week to make something that was no good at all—though before

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his arrest by Security exactly similar apparatus had worked admirably.

"It's tough!" said Brandon. "So now you go to Security?"

Jim nodded.

"I sent them full information once," he said hopelessly, "and the local office was under the control of the Things. So nothing happened. That may be the case again. Maybe all the higher-ups are under control. I don't know. I just have to gamble."

"As a business man," observed Brandon, "I'd say you have the wrong approach. You plan to walk into a Security office, tell them and prove to them that you're an escaped Security offender, tell them you've a Thing in a wire cage and try to tell them what it can do."

"Yes," said Jim bitterly. "And maybe they'll let it out only in a vault with at least some of them wearing iron caps. But maybe they'll simply let it out to examine it, and it will communicate instantly with the other Things and they'll link their minds to it and —it'll take over!"

"What you need is an advance publicity campaign," Brandon said reflectively. "You're going there to sell them an idea. What you want is for them to be trying to get some information from you. Let's see what we can do to bring that about."

Jim was morosely skeptical. He felt that the transmitter he had made should work and that the modulator should operate without difficulty. But it didn't. The fact had knocked all the self-confidence out of him. He was going ahead with the last chance he had—but there was panic in the back of his mind.

"I'm going to give myself up," he said grimly, "on the off-chance that I can convince them that they were right all along and that thought-transmission is dangerous. I'm not making any sacrifice.

"They'll put me in prison for life but if I stay out of prison I'll spend all my life hiding with a wire cap on my head. I'd rather take the chance of accomplishing something. If you can suggest a way to improve that chance I'll take it!"

Brandon thoughtfully laid out a plan of campaign. The most horrible part of it would be letting the Thing out of its cage but Jim agreed savagely. In the vault it should be as much cut off from its fellows as in the cage itself and both he and Brandon were safe against its power.

First, though, Brandon had to make a trip into the nearest town. He came back with a camera film and writing materials. He brought back a newspaper, too—and something was happening. There were scarehead headlines that read:

PLAGUE SUSPECTED IN DOWNSTATE CITY!

It appeared that newsreel photographers had taken pictures of some news event in the city from which both Jim and Brandon had made precarious escapes. When the pictures were shown in the state capital physicians noticed alarming oddities in the appearance of a considerable number of the people on the screen.

The color films, of course, were completely faithful in their reproduction of flesh-tints and doctors considered that they detected an amazing prevalence of extreme anemia—bloodlessness—among the people on the streets. In one of the newsreel shots a woman was observed to faint and the passersby paid no attention to her at all, as if such an occurence were so common as not even to arouse interest.

State health authorities saw the pictures and called the health department of the city. The very official who answered the call was himself in a grave physical condition though he denied it vehemently. Examination of the health-records filed with the state health authorities had showed a sharp and sudden rise in the death-rate.

But those figures were now challenged by the very men who had made them. They now insisted that the figures were wrong. They showed signs of panic.

The newspaper account said that state health officials hinted of suspicions that some not clearly identified malady had become rife in the downstate city and that its existence was being concealed. A check with recent visitors to the city in question revealed that some had noted the same condition but that some—themselves in extremely debilitated state—denied indignantly that anything was wrong.

Those who showed excessively low blood-counts were most emphatic in insisting that conditions in the downstate city were wholly normal. They had not been known to be ill before their visits to the suspected city, though, and in spite of their infuriated protests they had been removed to hospitals where bacteriological tests were in progress.

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"That," said Brandon triumphantly, "looks good! Our friends the Things are going to be unmasked, eh? We'd better go on with our job, but. . . ."

"It looks bad!" said Jim flatly. "Very bad! The state will send some men down to look things over. They'll be shown everything—including a Little Fella. And they'll come back swearing there is nothing wrong. The bad part will be that the Things may get uneasy."

"Let 'em!" said Brandon. "I'm wishing them lots worse than that!"

But Jim clamped his jaws. There was something the Things could do, if they thought of it, which would make all human effort vain. He went to the car and drew his revolver. He unlocked the car-trunk. He was savagely ready to shoot if by any chance the Thing had got free of its cage.

IT HADN'T. The trunk-space reeked horribly of the foetor the Thing exuded. Jim was nauseated by the stench but he reached in and caught hold of the cage. Then he swore.

The Thing had slashed at his fingers with its sharp fangs. Then it slavered horribly at the scent of blood. Jim shook with rage. He muffled the cage in his coat and carried it into the vault. In the open air his errand and his surroundings combined to make a strange effect.

It was near to sunset and all the world was green and fresh and fragrant and everything seemed clean and wholesome. So that the Thing raging in its cage and its smell and all the implications of the Thing's existence seemed doubly horrible.

Inside the rusted vault Jim and Brandon closed the inner door and the Thing became walled in on all sides with solid plates of steel. Then Jim untwisted the wires that held the cage shut.

The Thing came out, snarling voicelessly.

It was revolting to look at, even though it no longer glistened fatly with the sustenance it had drawn from human veins. Its bloated belly had shrunk. The pinkish hairless skin was flabby, now. It hung in sickening folds. The Thing had two tiny, malevolent eyes. It had a host of tiny members to serve for legs. It had small, sharp, deadly fangs. And it glared at them.

It was not quite as large as a football but it was not afraid of them. It regarded them with an extraordinary impatient arrogance. It hated them, to be sure, but it was the hatred a man might feel who had been temporarily at the mercy of lower animals. At the moment it prepared to reassert its mastery. The Thing had even an air of conscious, raging power!

Brandon moved suddenly. He bumped into the useless transmitter Jim had made. It started to topple, and he caught it nervously. He set it upright and spoke shakily.

"The blasted Thing thinks it can control us!"

Jim's eyes burned. Things like this held humans in bondage to be fed upon! The fury he felt would have been some protection in any case but he deliberately loosened his wire cap. He consciously and carefully let down his guard.

The Thing looked at him. Stared at him. But no thoughts hammered at him or even tried insidiously to worm their way into his consciousness. The Thing was not transmitting thought. Not to him—and, because of the vault's iron wall, not anywhere.

[*Turn page*]

"This Stairway Looks Like It's a Million Years Old!"

SO EXCLAIMED Carlotta the moment she saw the winding steps that soared steeply between banks of flowers as if—like Babel's tower—its makers intended it to pierce the sky. Its clean lines suggested dynamic purpose. Venomously green moss cushioned its steps. Twisted ropes of lianas portcullised it like curtains of woven black snakes awaiting the merest touch to waken them into tingling life.

It was only a forgotten flight of steps, yet from it pulsed a black aura of premonition. Hibbert and Burks would have turned from it. But Scarlatti, unaware of any threat, said: "Let's lamp where it lands."

What the four fugitives found when they ascended the stairs is one of the many surprises in THE BLUE FLAMINGO, by Hannes Bok, the amazing novel of magic and mystery coming next issue! Look forward to a truly remarkable work of scientifiction!

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"You won't talk, eh?" said Jim with sardonic humor. "Too bad!"

Then the Thing quivered. Its defiance suddenly melted. Its pose changed. It seemed suddenly to go into a panic. It scuttled desperately here and there on legs that were too feeble to carry it with either agility or speed.

It approached the closed thin iron doors. Jim contemptuously kicked it back. The tiny fangs snapped at his shoe and pierced the leather. He shook it loose and it fled before him. It fled into its cage and shrank against the farthest end.

"I think," said Jim, "that we can handle it. You get set. When you're ready I'll shake it out of its cage again."

Brandon had not actually seen a Thing before and he turned sick. As a matter of fact the two of them at that moment were the only human beings who had ever seen a Thing without becoming subject to it.

Therefore they were the only human beings to feel the instinctive repulsion, compounded equally of horror and disgust, which was the normal human reaction to a Thing. Jim had seen this one by match-light an instant before he rammed down the cage upon it.

He had seen another, encircled by flames of his own kindling, before it died. He felt deadly hatred, but Brandon's hands shook as he set up the camera-and-flash-bulb combination he'd gone to town to get.

They took pictures. Many pictures. The Thing seemed stunned and dazed, now, though they could not guess the self-evident reason. It had flashes of hysterical fury but on the whole it was amazingly quiescent. They photographed it from every angle, at a distance and close-up, showing every detail of its body and its similitude of a face with a mere breathing-orifice in place of a nose and its unspeakably revolting apparatus for feeding.

Jim booted it scornfully back into its cage.

"Plenty tame when it's helpless!" he said contemptuously. "How do the pictures look?"

Brandon was unrolling them from the camera. He'd used self-developing, self-reversing film because it would be easier to take extra shots than to make duplicate prints for their purposes. He nodded his head in satisfaction.

"I think they'll do!" he told him. "Nobody can look at these and think they're faked—or that the Thing that's pictured belongs on earth! Where d'you think they came from, Jim?"

"From hell," said Jim sourly. "And I want to send 'em back there."

He vengefully refastened the fastenings of the cage. He tightened the twisted wires with pliers. He felt contempt for the Thing, now—which was not wise. He underestimated its intelligence and he wholly missed the actual situation in which the Thing had found itself.

But he made sure that it was as securely caged as before and then took it out to the car-trunk again. He and Brandon lived in the vault, which was at least weather-tight.

"I'll write those letters," Jim said grimly when he came back, "whether they do any good or not."

With the tiny light at his disposal he began. There were a goodly number of them, and Brandon partially dictated one or two. When he was finished he was doggedly resolved.

"Probably not a bit of good," he said coldly, "but I've got to try everything. The heck of it is, those Things will be worrying about being discovered—and that's bad! Hallo! The transmitter's turned on! You probably threw the switch when you almost toppled it." Then he added bitterly, "Might as well smash it!"

But he didn't, though the impulse to do so was strong. And it was rather odd that he slept soundly that night. Not, of course, because he no longer had any hope. Not even because he knew how the Things could complete the conquest of all humanity if they only happened to think of something that had occurred to him.

In perspective it seems odd that he could have gone calmly to sleep after realizing that the transmitter had been turned on while the photographs were being taken.

CHAPTER XVI

Reaction

A VERY famous zoölogist was hoeing deftly in his garden—he grew excellent dahlias—when his granddaughter brought him the morning mail. He beamed at her and sat down in a garden-chair to look at it—a bill or two, which he regarded with disfavor, an invitation to lecture, a letter

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calling his attention to an article in a scientific journal, just published, and asking his opinion, a letter. . . .

He looked blankly at the photographs. They were three-dimensional of course and in color. The technical excellence of the film made up for some lack of experience in the photographer. They were pictures of a—a creature. It had a horde of small limbs for locomotion, and two small malevolent eyes, and a mere breathing-orifice instead of a nose. Its feeding apparatus. . . .

The zoölogist said, "Preposterous!"

He looked at a second photograph of the same object. It was in a different position. There were heavy veinings beneath a flabby, pinkish, hairless skin. The way in which it balanced itself on those seemingly innumerable feeble legs. . . .

The zoölogist said, "Ridiculous!"

He looked at the third picture and snorted. He did not bother to read the letter. He went back to his hoeing. But he frowned as he worked. Presently he went back to the discarded letter. He looked at the pictures again.

He said vexedly, "Fiddlesticks!"

The devices by which the creature lived and moved—if it lived and moved—were not like those of any known animal. Animals did not have an odd number of legs. They did not have four joints in their limbs. They did not have mandibular fangs. Especially they did not have such feeding apparatus.

The zoölogist threw down the photographs a second time. He went back to his hoe but he did not pick it up. He went yet again to the pictures. They were preposterous and ridiculous and a very suitable comment on them was, "Fiddlesticks!"

But they had an irrational plausibility. He observed this improbable feature. By itself it was impossible—but the thing that made it not impossible was there! Each arrangement was unorthodox in the animal world. But each was completely consistent with every other.

The zoölogist scowled. The thing was a wonderfully clever fake. Only a trained man could appreciate how wonderfully clever it was. But there must be something that would prove it a hoax.

He studied the pictures with concentrated attention. He grew irritated by his findings. The thing was unheard of but it was incredibly rational. Nobody could have combined so many ingenious improbabilities so deftly—nobody! It was not possible to create so soundly planned an impossibility!

At last he read the letter. He hesitated a long time. Then he went angrily to his visiphone and called Security.

The parasitologist looked at the pictures that had come in the morning mail. Clever—there were no parasites like this, of course, but that feeding apparatus, when you looked at it carefully, was a remarkably original and well-developed idea. No creature had it, but some creature should.

The fangs, too—a blood-feeder, of course. Those very curious jointed claws at the ends of the multiple legs . . . of course, for holding on to the animal the creature fed on! Actual parasites were small, so they needed no such devices, but if a parasite were as large as this fake . . .

IT WAS amusing to look for flaws in the hoax. If a parasite were this large it would need . . . hm . . . no. Not quite clever enough! Then he blinked. He'd been wrong. Quite clever enough—cleverer than he'd at first thought. The difficulty was met by this. . . .

The parasitologist examined the pictures with a mounting, absorbed interest. It was fascinating. Someone was trying to put across a clever hoax, but he must have slipped somewhere.

Presently he was saying excitedly to himself that only a genius could have designed this model. Everything fitted perfectly, though nothing was the way any known creature was equipped.

Later he was saying to himself that not even a genius could have designed this model! Nobody on earth could have done so perfect a job of imagining an animal which was not like any animal on earth in any single feature! Nobody could have interrelated so many novelties so perfectly!

When he called Security, after reading the letter, his voice shook with a mounting excitement.

A celebrated biologist called Security. He said acidly that he had been given to understand that a young man named James Hunt was about to surrender himself to Security for cause. There was reason to believe that James Hunt had information of unparalleled importance to the science of biology.

He had a specimen which must be examined by a capable man. He, the eminent biologist, very urgently requested to be allowed

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to interview James Hunt when he had surrendered himself and before he was shipped off to Life Custody.

THE Security Coördinator of Eastern Sector 5 spoke pompously.

"Yes. It's ridiculous, of course, but there are reports of extensive anemia in that area. If this Hunt person has actually discovered a parasite, as he declares, and it is actually responsible for the anemia—why, measures must be taken at once. At once!

"Check these fingerprints and see if he is actually the person his letter claims. Have the photographs examined and request an estimate of the magnification."

Jim's hand showed in one of the photographs, and the size of the Thing could very readily be deduced. But the Security Coördinator of Eastern Sector 5 had simply not noticed it. If he had he would have considered that Jim was trying to play a joke on him. And of course no crime could be compared to the unthinkable insolence of trying to play a joke on a Security Coördinator!

Fat Doctor Oberon, of Psychological Precautions, beamed fatly at a letter which did not contain any photographs at all. He had been quite sure that the young man Hunt, whom he himself had sentenced to life custody for experimenting in a forbidden field, had had confederates.

Now here was a letter from young Hunt, who had made a truly remarkable escape from Security custody. Hunt respectfully stated that he was surrendering himself and would bring in a sample of the thought-transmitters which Security detectors had shown to be in use but which they had not succeeded in tracking down.

Doctor Oberon beamed complacently. The young man had learned that it would not do to trifle with Security. Obviously, he expected a commutation of his sentence by complete surrender and the betrayal of his confederates.

But he was a dangerous character. He would be allowed to betray his companions, of course. So unprincipled and desperate a person amounted to a psychological hazard for the public at large.

Permanent and very strict confinement would be necessary.

Doctor Oberon sighed in pious satisfaction. It was always gratifying to have the sense of duty well done which came of a peril to the public safety forefended. . . .

A newspaper editor growled.

"What'll these cranks think of next? Who's this Hunt fella who wrote this? Says he escaped Security Custody and is classed as dead but he's very much alive and here are his fingerprints. Then he sends us these pictures and says these things are alive and he's turning one over to Security? Who's Hunt?"

Somebody investigated.

"Huh! Jumped from a patrol-ship, eh? Sounds flukey. Check the fingerprints anyhow. If they do check—but they won't—get a tame scientist to classify this thing—whatever it is—and tell 'em to make it dangerous for a picture spread. Get what you can on Hunt. Now, where's that sport-scandal story."

AN HOUR later on the visiphone—

"What's that? The scientist says it's alive but not terrestrial? Don't belong in any earthly phylon? What the gehenna's a phylon? . . . He means it's something that comes from another world? Let him stick his neck out! Make him sign it!

"We'll play it up as 'famous scientist says creatures from other worlds have reached earth.' One has been captured by young Hunt and is on the way to scientific circles for examination. Hey! Make it intelligent! He guesses it comes from Mars!

"Martians have copied the guided missiles we've sent there and come back in improved models! That's the angle. Say, when's this guy Hunt going to turn over this creature? We've got to have some reporters covering that."

Jim Hunt drove into the state capital with his head bandaged. The bandage held the wire cap in place, and was so obvious a trick that it was noticed and instantly dismissed, whereas a patently false head of hair would have caused him to be regarded with suspicion.

He halted in traffic where a sidewalk visiphone screamed stridently:

"Martians on Earth! Visitors from Other Worlds Have Arrived! Specimen of Other-World Race to reach Security Today! Do they Mean War? Read the Blade! Read the Blade! Read the Blade!"

He caught a glimpse of the visiphone screen. It showed the front page of a newspaper, and spread across the middle of the news-columns were reproductions of three of the pictures he and Brandon had taken.

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But he wouldn't let himself hope—not yet. There was that trick the Things might think of . . . He drove on grimly toward the local office of Security. So far everything looked perfect. But everything had looked perfect when he'd made the transmitter.

The transmitter had failed. This might, too. It shouldn't but if stupidity and ineptitude could spoil anything it was certain that the lower officials in Security would manage to spoil it.

There were people waiting in front of Security headquarters — newsreel men, still-picture photographers for newspapers, a television set-up. It simply wouldn't be possible for Security to hush up his surrender and the Thing—not even if there was a policy to make the world safe by allowing nothing that was unsafe to be known or found out or searched for.

He parked the car and got out of it. He was ignored. He opened the trunk-back. He was still ignored, though some people did sniff uneasily at the pungent, filthy, beastly smell that came out of it. Carrying the cage gingerly, he essayed to work his way through.

There was a rush. A small, savage knot of men formed and broke ruthlessly through the tangle of camera-tripods and wires. They leaped upon Jim. Hands clutched at his throat. Men snarled at him with the hysterical, terrible rage implanted by the Things in the minds of their subjects at however great a distance. Something struck Jim's head with terrific force. He felt the cage snatched from his hands.

Then he knew nothing.

CHAPTER XVII

The One Sane Man

HE WAS in a court-room. In Security court, which of course was not at all like other courts. The evidence had been heard in secret, which was standard Security practise lest facts be revealed which it was unwise to have publicly known—the details of an illegal experiment, for example. The sentence, however, would be public.

There was still news-interest in Jim Hunt. He had made a remarkable escape from a Security patrol-ship. He was an unusually desperate and resolute offender against Security. And he had worked a very clever publicity trick. But instead of the forty or fifty reporters and photographers who had waited to watch his surrender to Security there were just two to hear his sentence and both were very junior and correspondingly blasé.

Doctor Oberon sat on the judicial bench and beamed complacently. He was distinctly a third-rate man and did not often have the chance to bask in much publicity. When there was silence—and with no spectators and only two reporters and the Security Police present that did not take long—Doctor Oberon cleared his throat. He spoke blandly.

"Having been detailed by Security to determine this case I have heard all that the prisoner has to say. If he denies that his defense has been heard let his speak now."

"It was heard," said Jim Hunt, raging, "by an opionated fool!"

Doctor Oberon looked piously forgiving.

"The prisoner," he said with pained charity, "was previously sentenced to life custody for experiments in a forbidden subject, against the public welfare. He was detected in possession of an elaborate laboratory and in conjunction with other yet unapprehended criminals, conducting this highly dangerous research."

Doctor Oberon lectured complacently on the need for the protection of the public against dangerous knowledge.

"His sentence—which I was unfortunate enough to have to impose—was life custody. I urged him to reveal his confederates."

Jim Hunt spoke clearly:

"There were no confederates! But the Things transmit thought!"

"Now," said Doctor Oberon regretfully, "he comes before this court again. He surrendered himself under most suspicious circumstances. He had announced publicly that he had captured an alien, non-terrestrial life form.

"He claimed that he would deliver this life form for study and the verification of statements he would make on its delivery. He appeared, seemingly with the life form in question, at a Security office. And then a band of persons who were apparently his confederates in a hoax upon Security dashed at him, seized the small supposed cage in which he ostensibly carried this most unlikely creature—and fled.

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"Since then, he has demanded that Security undertake an elaborate investigation of what he declares to be an invasion by extra-terrestrial creatures. He asserts that they have an entire section of this state under their—ah—hypnotic control. It is difficult to determine whether he is a deliberate impostor of extraordinary brashness or a person subject to delusions."

"The delusion is Security's, that you're qualified to make any decision that requires intelligence!" Jim said bitterly.

But Doctor Oberon continued to be complacent.

"The decision of the court is that the prisoner has established no claim to a reconsideration of his sentence by reason of service to Security. His alleged information is either deliberate and unconvincing falsehood or sheer delusion. This court orders that his sentence to life custody shall stand.

"However, since while at large he is alleged to have committed various crimes, including murder, this court orders that he be delivered to the criminal courts for trial under criminal charges and returned to Security custody for the serving of his Security sentence when or if he is released by the criminal courts."

Doctor Oberon posed for photographs. The photographers shot flash-bulb pictures of Jim. It was routine. Their paper had been caught off-base. Now, for a while, it would stoutly maintain that Jim had been railroaded—that he'd had valuable information to give to Security.

But that would be only to cover up the fact that the paper had used him for a scarehead story. Ultimately, he'd be forgotten. The reporters and photographers alike knew that to be the program. These pictures would go on the inside of the paper, and the story, too. This was a matter of no importance at all.

JIM'S face was gray. In time the Things would spread over the whole world. If they thought of the trick he'd thought of first, they'd be carried over the whole world by men—joyfully. A sickly, beaten rage filled him.

Everything was useless. The earth would become a paradise for Things. Humans would till its fields half-heartedly, because their only thoughts would be the utterly contented thoughts the Things would tell them to think. Humans would delightedly serve and admire and cherish the Things that fed on them.

"NICE to have wiser people from another world tell us what to do . . . It will be NICE TO HAVE WISE PEOPLE TO TELL US WHAT TO DO . . . It is good that we have visitors from Mars . . . WE WILL be glad to DO WHAT WE ARE TOLD . . . IT WILL BE GOOD TO HAVE NEW RULERS TO TELL US WHAT TO DO . . . OUR NEW RULERS ARE NICE . . . EVERYTHING IS NICE NOW THAT WE HAVE NEW RULERS . . . EVERYBODY IS HAPPY. . . THE PEOPLE FROM ANOTHER WORLD MAKE EVERYBODY HAPPY . . ."

The thoughts came into his head with crushingly convincing force. They dwindled to mere nibbling suggestions and swelled and dwindled again as the Things established the linkage of their minds far away, and then suddenly swung into an overwhelming strength and certainty.

Jim, of course, as a prisoner of Security, could no longer wear a cap of iron wire. The thoughts of thousands of Things, linked together, could not be held at bay by a single, unassisted human mind. Even rage was not enough.

He knew what was happening but his thoughts were in a grip from which they could not escape. Uncontrollably his mind repeated the phrases the Things sent out for all men to think.

". . . NOW ALL HUMANS WILL BE HAPPY FOR ALWAYS . . . IT IS GOOD TO OBEY THE LITTLE FELLAS . . . WHAT THE LITTLE FELLAS TELL US TO DO IS ALWAYS WISE AND GOOD . . . IT IS NICE TO LOVE THE LITTLE FELLAS . . . IT IS HORRIBLE NOT TO LOVE THE LITTLE FELLAS . . . EVERYONE IS HAPPY BECAUSE THEY OBEY THE LITTLE FELLAS . . . ONE IS HAPPY TO OBEY."

Monotonously, irresistibly, terribly, these thoughts arose in Jim's brain. They possessed a stunning intensity. The thoughts that were himself were blotted out by them. Revolt and rage were mere whispering wailings between the hammering thoughts:

"WE GO ABOUT OUR BUSINESS AND WAIT FOR THE ORDERS OF THE LITTLE FELLAS . . . WE ACT AS USUAL, BUT WE ARE HAPPY BECAUSE THE LITTLE FELLAS TELL US WHAT TO DO . . . WHEN WE KNOW THE LITTLE FELLAS WANT US TO DO SOMETHING WE STOP EVERYTHING ELSE AND DO ONLY THAT. . . ."

On the judicial bench, Doctor Oberon spoke happily.

"It is evident that the prisoner has tried

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to injure our new rulers. He actually boasted that he killed one and made another a captive in a cage. So, of course, our duty is clear. The prisoner will be taken to our new rulers, at once, for their judgment."

It was a nightmare which Jim knew was a nightmare but which he could not even pretend was unreal. Only—instead of a nightmare's horror—he was filled with an insane exultation, a tragic sensation of excited happiness. Hammering thoughts pounded at him and he knew he was going to his death or worse.

But when the Security Police by his side began to lead him out of the room he went with them, his face—some remote corner of his brain knew despairingly—wreathed in a smile of utmost tranquillity and peace.

He marched with them gladly while thoughts he knew were not his own thoughts filled all his brain.

Then they dimmed a little—a very little more. They were muted to a mere insistent insidious nibbling of suggestion. He was being led through a corridor of iron cells. There was an iron floor underfoot. It was not enough to neutralize the thought-transmission entirely.

In minds not previously conditioned by knowledge of the possibility and horror of consciousness under outside control, the dimming of the transmitted thoughts would not even be noted. The victims would continue to contemplate them raptly, responding without suspicion to what seemed to be their own inner consciousness.

But Jim was conditioned. Abruptly, with Security Police on either side of him, he was filled with a strangling rage and a loathing horror that blanked the intruding thoughts to whispers. He raged. And his own brain took quick grim charge.

HE GLANCED swiftly at his guards. They wore expressions of rapt inner satisfaction. They were being told they were happy—that the Little Fellas made everybody happy—that earth was become a paradise, now that the Little Fellas were here. There was no more sorrow nor grief nor pain—no more poverty nor want nor vain striving. Everything was nice . . . nice . . . nice. . . .

Jim spoke, steadying his voice in an effort to keep the rage out of it.

"Everybody has to do what the Little Fellas tell them," he said quietly.

The guards beside him nodded. They smiled dreamy tranquil smiles. One does not question one's own thoughts. To the guards the things their own minds told them seemed utterly trustworthy. One does not question one's own reasoning, one's own conclusions, one's own beliefs. The Things' transmitted thoughts seemed to have risen from within, hence to be infallibly true—not subject to scrutiny or to question.

"The Little Fellas," said Jim as quietly as before, "don't think I'm fit to serve them. I tried to harm them. I must die."

The guards nodded again.

"Everybody obeys the Little Fellas," said Jim. "They tell me to kill myself. Give me a pistol. It is an order of the Little Fellas. I must kill myself."

The guards looked at him numbly. But their thoughts—the thoughts they believed their own—assured them that nobody could disobey the Little Fellas. Nobody could do anything the Little Fellas did not permit. Nobody could resist or even think of resisting an order of the Little Fellas. Everyone must. . . .

Jim reached out his hand without haste. Had he moved quickly, perhaps sheer habit would have made the guards react normally. But they were dazed by new and blinding revelation. They were absorbed in the thoughts which Jim was still horribly aware of even here in this iron-walled, iron-floored corridor.

With tranquil certainty, Jim drew the pistol from the guard's holster. He raised it as to his own head.

And he struck with the raging fury of the madman he had become. The first guard reeled. Before he crashed to the floor Jim had struck the second an equally terrible blow. He armed himself with their weapons, shaking all over with the fury he strove to make ever more overwhelming, hating so fiercely that he even allowed himself to imagine pumping bullets into the two still figures on the floor.

But the Things' thoughts continued to come into his mind. In this corridor, for a while, he could hold at bay their cumulative influence. But his wire cap was gone. If he moved from this corridor the thoughts of the Things would again fill all his brain, driving his own thoughts and his own will down and down and out of existence.

Then he saw a desk at the end of the corridor. There were an inkwell and pens on it, a few odd papers and a metal wastebasket

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beside it. Jim made a dash for the desk, panting his hatred of the Things.

At that he almost failed. The Things' thoughts filled every cranny of his mind but one when he reached the desk. It was almost incredible that the pattern of action he had commanded his muscles to follow should be carried out. But it was.

Papers spilled all about him. Then he sobbed in mingled rage and relief. He had the pistols of two guards in his hands, their cartridge-belts slung about his middle. And he was free of the Things' control. He was, at the moment, probably the only member of the human race not raptly absorbing the overwhelming rhythm of the thousands of Thing-minds, linked together.

He stood, panting and raging and filled with despair, looking like a lunatic with an upside-down woven-wire wastebasket covering his head and resting on his shoulders —the only completely sane man in all the world.

CHAPTER XVIII

Brandon's Collapse

THERE was probably only one hour in all of time when he could have escaped from Security Headquarters. That was the first hour of complete human submission to the Things. During that hour the Things conditioned humanity to their rule. They implanted in every human mind the rules and beliefs and habits of reaction they had found most desirable in this particular species of domestic animal.

Each rule and each belief and each command to some certain reaction-pattern had to be repeated many times and in many forms. And each had to be stated and repeated with such energy that it would fill a human mind to the exclusion of all other matters at the time. So, during the first hour of their submission, humans were apt to be absent-minded. They were thinking the thoughts of the Things.

And it was during that hour that Jim went raging through the headquarters of Security with a wastebasket on his head. For safety he added a second. He hid in a closet once while he tore strips of cloth and tied both wastebaskets down to each shoulder so that by no possibility could they be knocked or fall off.

In his escape Jim shot just one man and that man in the leg—and then only at the moment of his departure from Security headquarters in an official Security car. That one man tried vaguely to stop him because it seemed a little remarkable even at such a time for a man wearing wastebaskets for headgear to climb into an official car and essay to drive off in it.

But Jim got away. The traffic in the streets had slowed or stopped because almost everyone had ceased all activity to listen to the convincing, delightful assurances that they were very happy, happier than they had ever been before, and that earth was now a paradise because Little Fellas had come to rule it and tell humans what to do.

But when the Things in their stinking nests considered that men were conquered for all time, they broke their linkage one by one—and fed. Only then did human activities tend to go on as usual. But they were not normal. There was an expression of unearthly tranquillity on every face. The world had become transfigured. It was nice . . . nice. . . . It was paradise. Everyone was happy.

Some few humans, of course, rallied a little even from an hour-long exposure to suggestion of such intensity. But those rebels were few. Even they had had their defenses completely destroyed. Any Thing could send a thought into the mind of any one of them at any time, and any possible emotion would die at its nibbling touch to allow the thought to enter.

But Jim went raging over highways in an armed Security car with wastebaskets on his head. He was the only free man in a world of slaves to beasts. He would be hunted mercilessly by all of mankind. He must live with some such absurdity as this upon his head and he must steal all his food.

There was but one place where he was safe—the rusty iron vault of an abandoned bank building on the site of a rotted-away deserted village. His only occupation would be the hating of the Things, because he had tried to make a device which would defeat them and had failed. Well—he would smash that first of all, to be rid of tantalizing hope.

Then the Security car wabbled and almost left the road. Because in a blinding flash Jim saw again a thing that had happened.

It was a moment in the rusty vault. He'd

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given up the transmitter as hopeless. Brandon was going to take some pictures of the Thing out of its cage—the Thing that had since been rescued by the slaves of the Things, because they knew he was going to turn it over to Security at a certain time and place.

Jim had untwisted the wires which held the cover on and the Thing came out and glared at them. It had been arrogant and furious and somehow utterly confident—so completely confident that it was menacing—and Brandon stumbled against the useless transmitter and almost toppled it over. He'd caught it, shakily. Then he'd said—

"The blasted Thing thinks it can control us!"

And then the Thing had quivered and its defiance had suddenly left it. It had appeared to go into a panic. When Jim kicked at it it had buried its fangs in his shoe. But when he shook it loose it had fled back into its cage. He had had to shake it out so that they could take the pictures they wanted. It was cowed. *And—later—he'd noticed that the transmitter was turned on!*

DRIVING in a speeding car he veered crazily from the shock of the discovery. Jim understood now. He understood everything that had happened. And, very very suddenly, he realized that just as the Things had had a trick with which they could enslave all humanity as soon as they thought of it, he'd had a trick that could have preserved human freedom if he'd thought of it in time.

Even now he could restore that freedom if only he could hurry and get back to the transmitter.

He braked the car. He slowed it to the sedatest and safest of speeds. He watched all traffic with a terrified fear—a traffic accident would end the future of the human race. And he remembered the weirdness of his own appearance, with his head encased in wastebaskets, and turned the polarizing switch of the windshield and side-windows to cut down not only the light that came in but the clarity with which anyone could see him.

And he shivered with anxiety.

When at long long last he turned off a highway and followed a disused trail into wilderness his clothes were soaked with the sweat of terror. But he reached the open space where mounds of climbing vines lay over the ruins of what had been homes. It was night by then and a bright moon shone on a world of abject slaves and feasting Things.

Jim got out of the car and stumbled to the vault. It was untouched. His hands shook as he made a light and verified the fact that the transmitter was exactly as he had left it. Brandon doubtless had left this hiding place severely alone. He had been skeptical that Jim could convince Security. If Jim were enslaved he would surely lead someone here.

Yes—everything was quite all right. He checked the batteries—those wonderful batteries of neutron-bombarded alloy which yielded power steadily for years on end. They were right.

Then thrashing sounds came from outside. Someone waded heavily through the underbrush. The intruder came to the open space which was the site of the ghost-town. He came, still stumbling, directly toward the vault.

By the moonlight Jim saw who it was—Brandon. He was stumbling like a drunken man, walking with an hypnotic fixity of purpose like that of a sleep-walker. His clothes were torn by briars. He looked haggard and exhausted and dazed.

Jim stepped out into the moonlight.

"*Brandon!*" he said sharply. Doubt assailed him.

Brandon checked his stride and stood swaying.

"Oh—Hello, Jim," he said in a sort of automaton-like precision. "You smashed it yet?"

"Smashed what?"

"That transmitter," said Brandon with the same unearthly precision. "It's got to be smashed, you know. The Little Fellas rule us now. Everybody's happy. Everybody's glad the Little Fellas tell them what to do.

"We have to smash everything that the Little Fellas don't like and they don't like things that could harm them! So I came back to smash the transmitter. Maybe it couldn't harm them but when we made it we thought it might."

Jim stiffened.

"Funny how we fought the Little Fellas," said Brandon tonelessly. "Wouldn't fight them now. I even fought them after everybody else loved 'em, Jim. But they kept after me. Let's smash the transmitter, Jim."

Jim plunged for him. But he stumbled and Brandon seized him. Brandon was a heavier man than Jim and he was possessed by hypnotic frenzy. They locked and struggled

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and Jim felt bitterly that he would have to shoot his former friend. He was struggling to reach one of the pistols he had taken from his guards when he felt Brandon tearing at the fastenings of the baskets which held them firmly over his head.

"Listen to the Little Fellas!" said Brandon fiercely. "You're a fool to fight them! They've made everybody happy. Look at me! When I've smashed that transmitter I'm going to find a Little Fella and tell him about it."

Then maniacal strength came to Jim. When he came to himself he was panting and Brandon lay unconscious on the ground.

Jim dragged him into the vault and tied him fast with cords made of his own clothing. Then he took the transmitter carefully out into the open air. He turned it on—exactly as it had been turned on at the moment they planned to take photographs and the captive Thing had suddenly turned craven and panicky.

He turned it on. That was all.

CHAPTER XIX

Round Up

THE dawn came. Out of the open doors of the vault and through the empty space that once had been the plate-glass-windowed frontage of a bank Jim watched a gray light steal over all the world.

There were the drowsy chirpings of small birds. The light grew brighter. Ruddy sunshine smote on dew-wet grass and glistening leaves and seemed to find all earth a place of jeweled freshness. There were morning spider webs that seemed to be made of threaded diamonds. There were spots of cobwebbing that looked like disks of silver on the grass.

Suddenly it was day. Jim stood up and loosened the absurd bonds that held his grotesque headgear to his shoulders and walked out into the open. He put his hands to the metal baskets. He lifted them, very slowly and very cautiously at first. He took them off entirely and seemed to listen with an intense and painful care. And then he tossed his protection away.

When Brandon opened his eyes—they were sane eyes now—Jim nodded to him, sitting bareheaded in the sunshine. Jim looked very very tired.

"Head clear now?" he asked heavily. "Sorry but you wanted to smash the transmitter."

"I'm all right," said Brandon. He essayed to move, and found out his bonds. "Hm—you tied me up. Good idea. It was pretty bad, Jim. I thought I was immune. And so I was to everything they ever shot at me before. But they pulled a new one.

"They put so much power into whatever they did that even I had to fight it. I held out a long time. It seemed centuries. And I knew that if I ever stopped fighting they'd get me—and the time came when I had to. They did get me."

He lay still in the bonds in which Jim had tied him.

"They got everybody," said Jim. He sat quietly still.

Brandon's eyes widened suddenly.

"Hey!" he said sharply. "Where's your cap? That iron-wire cap? Have they got you too?"

"They haven't got anybody now," said Jim. He looked too weary to be elated. "They're licked. That's why I've thrown away my cap. It feels rather good to sit bareheaded and think that people are free—even the ones who were conquered first of all."

Brandon's eyes were wide.

"What's that? *How?*"

Jim nodded listlessly at the transmitter.

"That did it. It was awfully simple, after all. Remember when we were trying to make it work? I believed the transmitter was all right but I couldn't make the modulator pick up any thoughts to feed to it. I didn't want it to retransmit the Things' thoughts! I wanted it to pick up my own.

"So I worked in the vault where the Things' thoughts couldn't come. And the modulator didn't pick up anything at all. Funny I didn't see why. It was so infernally simple!"

"I don't get it," Brandon said blankly.

"I wore a wire cap to keep the Things' thoughts out of my brain. You've got a metal plate in your skull which seems to work the same way. Remember? We put a metal cage around the Thing to keep thoughts from getting out of its brain. It just didn't occur to us that we'd the same thing around ourselves. My wire cap and your metal plate kept thoughts from coming in. They also kept thoughts from going out."

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"Oh."

"Our brains were in cages, the same as the Thing's. So there wasn't anything in the vault for the modulator to work on. That's why it didn't work."

"But. . . ."

"I'd taken the modulator all apart," said Jim, "and couldn't find anything wrong with it. I gave up. We got ready to take pictures. We let the Thing out. It was cocky. It tried to control us. It couldn't. We were protected. Then you stumbled against the transmitter. You caught it before it fell and turned it on in grabbing at it.

"Remember, we noticed it was turned on later? As soon as the transmitter went on without modulation the Thing got panicky. It got scared. It tried to run away. It ducked back into its cage. It was pretty tame—the transmitter did it."

Brandon drew a deep breath.

"I'll take your word for it. I don't understand."

"It's just as simple as all the rest," said Jim indifferently. "Thought is the modulation of a field of force. Our brains don't make much of a field outside our skulls, though they modulate it very well. That's why telepathy works only sometimes.

"The Things make a comparatively big field outside their skulls, and modulate it very well. So they can transmit thought. The transmitter—" he nodded at the device—"isn't so very big but it makes a monstrous field. And it doesn't modulate it at all."

HE STOPPED. After an instant he shrugged and went on.

"Take a bass drum. Assume the drumhead's loose. You make a gadget that tightens it a little and taps it a little. Not much noise. Make another gadget that tightens it quite a lot and tap it pretty hard. You get a lot of noise. Then put a compressed-air line to the drum and pump in air until it's iron-hard. The air doesn't bang. But how much noise can the other gadgets make? Not much."

Brandon blinked.

"The Things make a field. They can modulate it," said Jim. "But the transmitter makes a field a thousand times as strong. The fields blend. And the Things can't impress a modulation on a field a thousand times as strong as they can make!

"They can't drive a modulation out of their own skulls—though their flesh, having liquid in it, is a conductor and the field stays on the surface without sinking in. The Things become just ordinary animals. Incidentally, human telepathy is out of the question now too."

He got up and came slowly into the vault. He loosened the bonds that held Brandon helpless.

"D'you think it's all right to let me loose yet?" Brandon said uneasily.

"I think so," said Jim casually. "Anyhow I'll shoot you if you go near the transmitter before I'm sure." Then he smiled faintly. "I'm having too much fun to want it to stop. I'm just picturing things to myself. Try it!"

He went out and sat down bareheaded in the sunshine again. He thought contentedly. But his thoughts were not like those of the Things—not at all.

There were people in the mountain country who had a Little Fella in the attic. They waited for him to summon them and to give them orders. Nothing happened. They received no orders. They were not summoned. They puzzled over it.

Days passed.

They ceased to wait for commands, without realizing that they ceased to wait. They grew stronger. They grew energetic. They came to dread a summons to the Little Fella. Still none came.

Finally—after weeks—someone went uneasily up to the attic. There was an evil smell there. The Thing was still in its nest. It moved eagerly as the human drew near. But it did not order the human to approach. The someone went down, shuddering a little. The Thing was unspeakably repulsive.

One didn't want anything like that in the house.

There was a Thing in the boiler-room of an apartment-house in a city. It ceased to command its slaves. They did not seek it out. Naturally! Days passed. It smelled evilly. No one went near it. It stirred eagerly when there was movement in the cellar. But its nest was shunned.

Ultimately, in desperation, it climbed out of the nest on its own feeble legs. Desperately it lay in wait for a furnace man. When he came, it advanced upon him, slavering. He received no commands and, shuddering, moved to avoid it. It moved desperately upon him. It sank its fangs ravenously in his ankle. In panic, he struck it fiercely with the coal-shovel.

He hit it. It tried to flee. He hit it again,

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suddenly raging. In a frenzy of revulsion he battered it to lifelessness.

A Thing came bumping down a flight of attic steps. It no longer glistened fatly. Its belly was flabby and the skin hung in folds. Its beady eyes were desperate. In the kitchen, the woman screamed a little. The Thing moved toward her, slavering. She ran into the farm-yard. The Thing followed.

It bumped down the steps to the ground. A dog came toward it, bristling. The Thing was ravenous. It was starving. If fixed its beady eyes upon the dog, which came closer, sniffing its fetid smell and growling. It slashed at the dog with its fangs.

The dog tore it to pieces, snarling.

A Thing lay in a nest of soft furs, in a nest of which the heat was thermostatically controlled. The woman who had ordered the expensive nest prepared grew restive. She complained to her husband of the smell. He had the nest thrown out. The Thing was a waif. It skulked in dark places, going mad with rage at its own helplessness and the utter lack of response of even small, feral animals to its will.

It tried to feed upon the kittens of an alley-cat. The alley-cat ripped it in maternal frenzy with long sharp claws. Suddenly blood jetted from some unprotected vein close to its thin and hairless skin. It struggled more and more feebly.

Things which were neglected—Things which were ignored—Things which were regarded at first dubiously and then disgustedly by humans who had been their slaves and who became horribly ashamed that they had been slaves.

Things which were taken out-of-doors and shot because men were ashamed—Things which were drowned because men hated to remember what they had done for those Things—Things which had been greedy and were suddenly faced by the parents of a human which had been the victim of a Thing's gluttony.

Those parents hated the Thing for what they had allowed it to do and they took the Thing and tried with horrifying ingenuity to make it pay. Things which were put into cages and dumped into trash-cans for garbage collectors to take away.

AND, of course, Things who were carefully examined by scientific men who tried to understand the secret of their domination—and its end. Things which were carefully killed and dissected—Things which an animal-trainer tried to teach to do tricks because he knew that they understood human speech—but which he had to kill because of their insatiable blood-lust.

Things which had no slaves and no civilization, and no science or art or knowledge, who had suddenly become mere animals unable even to communicate with one another—which strayed or escaped from the places where they had been masters and encountered each other and fought horribly for the pure purpose of cannibalism.

Things which struggled with a desperate resolution to reach the place where their space-craft had landed—and found it surrounded by men who killed them ruthlessly.

And Things which were doled out small rations of the blood of slaughtered animals, given to them when they responded to the painstaking questions of scientists and withheld when they did not. . . .

It was two weeks before three Security cars drove carefully up to the place where there had once been a village but where now there was only the shell of a single brick building and certain mounds of rotted timbers overgrown with vines. Men in the uniform of Security officials got out. They came toward the brick shell in which the vault still stood.

Jim faced them, his hand on his revolver. But he recognized one or two of them from pictures. One in particular he recognized as the tired-faced, white-haired man who had helped make the first atomic bomb some thirty years before and had devoted his life ever since to the prevention of the use of other bombs and their equivalents. He was the director-general of Security but he had none of the pomposity of his underlings.

"I think," said the white-haired man, "that you must be James Hunt. You see, we improved our detectors. When we came to our senses our detectors showed a much stronger field than had ever been registered before and we managed to trace it."

"Hm . . . You should," Jim said shortly. "It isn't focussed."

"Yes," said the white-haired man. "I've reviewed the file on you, Mr. Hunt. Your apparatus, which we seized, was very ingenious."

"I don't think that you came here to pay me compliments!"

"In part I did," the Director-General of

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Security said humbly. "But I also came to tell you that you can turn off your transmitter now."

"You can turn it off," said Jim grimly, "after you kill me!"

The Director-General of Security smiled. "It doesn't matter. You see we worked with the apparatus we seized from your laboratory. We worked out the principles involved. And we've built thirty more transmitters, all of which are working now.

"Yours alone took care of the Things but it's hardly likely that all the others will go out of action at the same time. We made a large number for—security. Your vigil isn't necessary any longer. That's all."

JIM relaxed. Then he shrugged. He looked at the men who had got out of the three Security cars.

"I suppose," he said sardonically, "that I'm under arrest, now. I've a life sentence for breach of security, I'm charged with a murder I didn't commit, with two escapes from custody and there's a hold-up you can bring against me. I did break the law in working on thought-transmission! But if I hadn't worked at it I'd have had no idea how to stop it! I did smash the Things! I've got that much satisfaction!"

Then he shrugged.

"All right," he said cynically. "I suppose I've accomplished enough for one man. I'll go to jail now and you can smash the transmitter if you like. I'll come quietly!"

The white-haired man nodded.

"I understand your attitude," he said gently. "But we did think we were doing the right thing. Now we know we weren't. I did not come to arrest you but to ask your help. We have found the space-ship in which the Things came here. They had rather manlike creatures in it with them—all dead.

"The controls were designed to be operated by those manlike creatures, not by Things. We've forced some Things to explain by signals. It appears that they control some nine planets in two solar systems, all of them inhabited by the same beings who had apparently built the space-ship and on whom the Things apparently—fed."

Jim tensed.

"If space-travel is possible," said the Director-General, tiredly, "now we know that we have to have it. If Things such as came to earth, control any other civilization, we have to end their empire.

"In short, we are going to build a space-fleet to destroy the menace the Things constitute and it is probable that we will enter into friendly relations with the race or races we liberate from them. We are reversing our policy of isolationism. We can do nothing else. But it may be hard for some of us to change our way of thinking."

"Well?"

"We'd like you to accept a post with Security," said the white-haired man humbly. "If not we'd like you to advise us. We have to change our whole outlook to—well—nearly that of the people we have considered criminals. Also we will need to equip our fleet with adequate protection against transmitted thought. We have to learn."

"I fought against Security because it tried to make us safe by not letting us find out anything that could be dangerous! But I think we can be safe only when we know how to handle anything dangerous!"

The older man looked very, very humble.

"After thirty years of thinking otherwise," he said wrily, "I admit that you seem to be right. We have to reverse our position and encourage nearly everything we have forbidden. We have to live dangerously because safety appears not to be safe."

Then he added almost wistfully, "It should be very fine to be a young man now, with a chance to take part in the conquest of the stars and the planting of human colonies in the Milky Way. You see, Mr. Hunt, I'm not offering you a reward for what you've done. I'm asking you for more help. We have so much to do and we need young minds! That's what I came here for!"

Jim tried to be dignified. He didn't quite make it. He grinned. He spoke awkwardly.

"Really, sir, an awful lot of what happened was just bull luck. I pulled some awfully stupid tricks. But if you can let me have a share in starting things off in a new direction—" He drew a deep breath. "Heavens, yes! You ought to meet Brandon by the way. Brandon! Come on out here!"

And to the Director-General of Security, who was of course the most powerful man in the world, Jim Hunt added, "He's been keeping a submachine-gun on you from inside there. By the way, he isn't crazy."

Brandon came out of the bank vault. And the Director-General of Security, the head of the organization which had the final word in all the affairs of men, murmured, "He's not crazy? That's at least refreshing!"

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Through the Purple Cloud

By JACK WILLIAMSON

Engineer George Cleland is catapulted into a twisted inferno to suffer days of terror and torture — and only the girl with the cool grey eyes can help to light up his black pathway!

AS THE gigantic four-motored passenger plane took off from the Los Angeles airport, George Cleland glanced at the girl sitting across the aisle. George was returning to his office in San Francisco, and to his engineering work after a summer's vacation.

He watched the girl with interest. Clearly it was her first long flight. Her smooth cheeks were flushed with excitement; her shining gray eyes looked up and met his. She smiled a little, accepting him as a companion in the adventure of the flight.

Already the great plane had rolled across the field with accelerating speed, powerful motors thundering, and had left the ground to rise easily through the low, gray fog, into the brilliant sunlight of the August morning.

George liked the girl. She was pretty. Her soft brown hair, glistening with ruddy lights, was tastefully arranged. She wore a dark green traveling suit, neat and trim.

Two other men were sitting in that rear compartment with them and the rest of the seats were empty. Facing George was a slender, meager, little man, whose black suit was polished with wear. He wore enormously thick-lensed glasses, and his face was narrow, pinched, bird-like, so that he gave George's imaginative mind the suggestion of a grotesque, goggle-eyed monster.

Presently he leaned forward with the map of the route that the steward had handed him, introduced himself as Howard Cann. He said that he owned a dry goods store in Oakland, and asked George to help him locate the observatory which, according to the map, should be in sight on Mt. Wilson. His voice sounded thin and birdlike, above the unceasing roar of the motors.

George pointed out the silver domes and towers shimmering on the crest of the mountain, in the bright August sunlight. Cann nodded his thanks, and bent over the map again.

The other man was sunk sullenly into a seat facing the girl. George did not like him. His clothes fitted his bull-like form loosely, grotesquely. His heavy-jowled face was black with a short stubble of beard. From beneath a disreputable cap, pulled low over his forehead, he was staring at the girl, rather to her discomfort.

His ferret eyes were black, shifty. George noticed that he swept the compartment watchfully, at intervals, always resuming his annoying gaze at the girl. I wouldn't like to meet him on a dark night, thought George.

SOME stories are forgotten almost as soon as they are printed. Others stand the test of time.

Because "Through the Purple Cloud," by Jack Williamson, has stood this test, it has been nominated for SCIENTIFICTION'S HALL OF FAME and is reprinted here.

In each issue we will honor one of the most outstanding fantasy classics of all time as selected by our readers.

We hope in this way to bring a new permanence to the science fiction gems of yesterday and to perform a real service to the science fiction devotees of today and tomorrow.

Nominate your own favorites! Send a letter or postcard to The Editor, STARTLING STORIES, 10 East 40th St., New York 16, N. Y. All suggestions are more than welcome!

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Bullets whined and screamed about them, crashing on the dull black wall of the canyon

They had been up a little less than an hour when the astounding catastrophe took place.

The air had been smooth, though the ship seemed to rise and fall with a slow, almost regular motion. The girl had seemed to be enjoying her flight immensely, peering out of the windows with a lively interest. Once or twice, to George's pleasure, she had leaned over to watch when he was pointing out something of interest on Cann's map.

Once she had asked some little question. Her voice, above the roar of the four great motors, had seemed clear and pleasant. George began to regret that the flight and their companionship must end so soon.

But the plane, and most of her passengers, never reached Alameda.

George happened to be peering out when it occurred, trying to locate for Cann the town of Maricopa, which lay a little to the left, and ahead of the plane. The air before the ship was suddenly filled with a blinding purple light, as though a great shell had burst, releasing a vast volume of incandescent violet vapor. A moment before, the sky had been clear. The purple cloud appeared suddenly, as if from thin air.

Its diameter must have been many miles extending from the ground into the cloudless sky above them. The great plane was plunging almost at the center of it, and far too close for the pilot to turn aside.

At the last instant the ship suddenly tilted up, as if the pilot had attempted to zoom above the purple cloud. But as they pierced it, George saw it contract swiftly.

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It became a great, smooth-surfaced sphere of violet-red radiance. Then, somehow, it seemed to flatten, become thin, until it was only a disk of red-blue light.

Then it became a circle of purple flame a hundred yards and more in diameter, a disk of amethystine fire, hanging in the air, with the great plane plunging away from its center.

A long, dreadful instant went by, after George knew that they had crashed through it. He had time to wonder if it could be only some trouble with his eyes, then he realized that others could see it, for Cann shrank back from the window and clutched at his arm.

Without a sound or a vibration, they had passed through the purple disk, into a flood of crimson light.

One instant, the blue sky was above and the green fields beneath. The next, they were flying at some crazy angle beneath a sky that was red, plunging toward the foot of a precipitous cliff of jet-black rock.

The cloud of purple had been like a gate to another world. They had flashed through it, into another plane of existence. To the science of a few decades ago, such a thing would have been incredible. But Einstein's relativity, with its four-dimensional continuum, with its destruction of the old conception of space as an absolute dimension, brings it much nearer to understandable phenomena. And it is confidently trusted that the implications of the incident narrated here will result in a farther modification of the changing theories of relativity.

The plane was hurtling toward the base of a rugged, towering wall of grim black rock, which had suddenly appeared beyond the purple disk. A crash was inevitable. The pilot had time only to bank the ship, causing it to strike the black cliff obliquely instead of head on.

George was stunned by the crash. His last recollection was of their plunging flight toward the sheer, soaring wall of black rock, of the attempted turn that had failed to save them.

MEMORY did not return at once as George recovered. He found himself lying in the bottom of a dark, cramped place, with a soft human body beside him. A hoarse voice, evidently that of the bearded man, was muttering curses, while heavy feet, apparently belonging to the same individual, were carelessly trampling George's legs.

Then George caught the acrid odors of burning paint and gasoline. His memory returned. He knew that the plane had crashed into the black mountain wall, that it was wrecked and in flames. The soft body against his was that of the girl. And it was the big man who was trampling on the others.

George tried to struggle up, pressing a hand to his head to try to stop the dizzy pain, to clear the faintness from his vision and the ringing noises from his ears, to sweep the misty clouds of pain from his mind.

A suffocating breath of flame came from the forward part of the ship, where the blaze had evidently started. The fuselage was on its side, George saw. The door was above them. And the big, bull-like man, walking upon their bodies as carelessly as if they were sacks of grain, was struggling to open the door.

Suddenly there was a sharp snap, as if he had broken a lock with the strength of his great, heavy hands. A moment later the door was thrown back, revealing the sky above, crimson, dark and sullen, red as if deluged in blood.

For a moment the strange scarlet sky was in view. Then thick masses of black smoke, touched with flickering, lurid yellow flames, floated across it. George heard the increasing roar of the conflagration.

He tried to struggle to his feet, still rubbing his throbbing head.

"Thanks, mister," came the hoarse voice of the giant, mockingly.

The huge man placed one heavy foot on George's shoulder, while he was still on his knees, sprang forward. He clambered through the door in the uppermost side of the cabin.

George was sent crashing to the bottom of the compartment again under the force of the ruthless kick. Choking black smoke, so hot that it seared his lungs, was filling the little space when he struggled up again. The roar and crackle of the flames was growing swiftly louder. A black and yellow canopy of smoke and flame was rolling above the door.

Still his head throbbed with dull pain; his thoughts were slow; confused; he reeled, his knees buckled uncertainly.

"Not much time, now," he thought. "Guess they are all gone in the front part of the ship."

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He bent beside the girl, lifted her with an effort, fighting to control his shaking knees. She was conscious.

"What's—matter?" she whispered in a slow, uncertain voice.

"Plane smashed," he said. "Burning. We must get out! Able to help?"

"I'll try," she murmured through white, compressed lips.

He lifted her in his arms. She grasped the side of the door, he pushed her up. She scrambled through it. For a moment she darkened the opening. Then she was gone from sight. Smoke and fire were still rolling over the opening.

The forward part of the plane was already an inferno. White heat drove down the aisle. Blinding, blistering smoke swirled into the compartment. Gasping for breath, tears streaming from his eyes, perspiration running from his skin under the scorching heat, the engineer stood still a moment, to recover from the exhausting effort that had been required to lift the girl through the door.

A choking groan came from beside his feet. He bent, wiping the tears from his smoke-blinded eyes, distinguished the limp little body of Cann, lying in a heap in a corner of the compartment, sprawled over the back of a seat. Fighting the heavy inertia that tugged at him, George lifted the limp body and thrust it up toward the door. It was a terrific task. Some malignant demon seemed to be pressing back against him. His aching muscles relaxed, despite the fiercest effort of his will. The unconscious man fell back into his arms.

George bent, sucked in a deep breath of the cooler air that hung in the bottom of the compartment, and raised himself, thrusting the body of the little man up again. At last his arms straightened; the still body was outside, lying beside the door, atop the fuselage.

A blistering tongue of lurid yellow flame licked through the compartment, up through the open door. George gasped and strangled from the hot breath of it. He felt hair burned from his head, felt the bare skin of his face and hands scorched. Reeling from exhaustion and the lingering effects of the blow he had received when they fell, he bent for another gasping inhalation of the still breathable air in the bottom of the compartment. Then he stood up, grasped the sides of the door, leaped, and struggled to draw himself through it.

With a last fierce effort, he swung himself up, got his feet upon the edges of the door, straightened up in a blast of smoke and flame. In a moment he had snatched up Cann again, and leaped, blindly, desperately, into space. He came down on bare, hard rock. The smoke was still blinding, he could feel the beating radiation of heat from the inferno which he had just escaped.

Sucking in great breaths of the cooler air, he dragged Cann over the rock, to where the heat was bearable. He dropped his limp burden, still drawing fresh air into his tortured lungs, and wiping his smarting eyes.

AN AMAZING world he saw, when he was able to open his painful eyes. Half of it was hidden by the dense clouds of smoke and the lurid curtains of yellow flame that leaped from the blazing wreck of the plane; but in the half that he saw was matter enough for wonder and amazement.

The sky was red, intensely crimson, dark and oppressive. Like a dome cut from a monster ruby, and lit with a dull, sinister light from beyond. It was unbroken by cloud or sun or star. A pall of scarlet gloom, sullen and terrible. Beneath the lowering, crimson sky was a barren waste of black rock. It resembled obsidian, without the glassy luster of the volcanic glass. It was a dead, dull black, somber and unrelieved by any gleam. It did not even reflect the angry fire of the scarlet sky.

It seemed that they were at the bottom of a vast pit or abyss, for sheer black precipices, like that against the foot of which the plane had crashed, rose about them in a rugged wall, leaping up to inconceivable heights.

The diameter of this crater or pit must have been ten or a dozen miles, and the cliffs that ringed it, fully five miles high. No elevations of this abruptness are found on the earth, though several are to be observed upon the moon. The walls of several lunar ring-craters rise vertically for several miles. This abyss appeared to be of similar formation.

The floor of the pit was a rugged, tortured wilderness of black rock, cracked and scarred, pitted with innumerable chasms, thrown up in miniature peaks, twisted into grotesque fantasies of lifeless black stone.

George saw no tree, no bird or insect—no living thing at all. He had no time to

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wonder at it, then. He merely swept the weird horizon of scarlet sky and stupendous dull black cliff with a single glance, and turned back to the burning plane.

Where was the girl? She had been conscious when he helped her through the door. Had she been able to reach a safe distance from the flaming ship? He heard a faint cry, and found her lying on the ground, several yards from the burning ship. She had been able to slip from the upper side of the fuselage to the ground, to stagger away a few steps before she collapsed. George carried her out of the smoke, and placed her beside the still inert body of Cann.

"Where are we?" she whispered.

"I don't know," George said. "We'll think of that after a while. I was almost wondering if I wasn't seeing things. But we have a patient here to look after."

He bent over Cann's limp body.

"Oh!" the girl cried suddenly, with pain in her voice. "You're all burnt! Your face, and your hands! You stayed to carry us out!"

"What else could I do?" George asked.

"There was another man that didn't stay," the girl said. "He trampled all over us, and then climbed out and left us to burn."

"Wonder where he went," George said. He looked about them, over the rugged, desolate wilderness of twisted black stone.

It frightened him, though he took care not to show the girl his fears. He dropped his gaze from the fearful wonder of the new world, and resumed his slow examination of Cann's body.

The little man was still unconscious. His clothing had been scorched and torn. His thick glasses were lost, and he looked oddly different without them, small and weak, like a child, or perhaps a crippled bird. His right upper arm had been broken. George pushed up the sleeve to examine it. On the skin was the blue print of a man's heel; the bull-like man who sat opposite the girl had stepped on it, breaking the bone.

George straightened the limb, and tried to set it. But he could find nothing satisfactory to use for splints. There seemed to be no tree or bush, or any living thing at all, in the wilderness of black rock, from which he could get a splint. But during his search he made a curious discovery. The barren waste of dead black stone was scattered with huge green crystals. Clear and transparent, as if cut from monster-emeralds.

In shape, they resembled snow-crystals, as seen through the microscope. Six-pointed stars, with a delicate, symmetrical fretwork, never the same in two crystals, between the points. But they were far huger than snow crystals—three feet from point to point. They were usually three or four inches thick. The first one that George discovered, lying in a deep crack in the black rock not far from where the plane had crashed, weighed about twenty pounds. He had no idea of what material it was composed, though it seems that it must have crystallized in the air, and fallen as a snowflake falls in our world.

While George was working over Cann, the girl told him something of herself. "My name is Juanita Harvel," she said. "Dad has a fruit ranch near Los Angeles. I was going up to Berkeley, to the University. I was to graduate this year but my prospects, right now, aren't very good." She smiled a little. Then soberly, "Where can we be?"

"Your guess is as good as anybody's," George told her.

"Do you think—" she asked, and paused oddly, "do you think that—we could be dead? The plane smashed. It may have killed us all."

"Not a bit," George cried. "For myself, I feel very much alive and real, especially where the skin was cooked so it's coming off!" He grinned painfully.

"Oh, I'm so sorry for you!" Juanita cried.

"That's all right," George assured her. "It won't make much difference, if I'm dead. And if I'm alive, I'll get well."

"But where are we?" the girl asked desperately.

"I don't know—but I'm wondering—have you ever heard of the fourth dimension?"

"Yes, but I don't know what it is. The plane, you know, flew into a circle of purple light that appeared suddenly ahead of us. It may have been a sort of a gate to another world, through the fourth dimension. This planet may be so far distant in space from our own world that it is in another universe, yet touching it in the fourth dimension."

"How could that be?" Juanita asked in a puzzled tone.

"I don't know whether I can explain it very clearly. But a favorite method in such discussions is to form an analogy in dimensions of a lower order. Suppose we were two-dimensional beings, with length and width, but no thickness. Suppose our world

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were on the surface of a sheet of paper. And suppose this planet were on the other side of the sheet, just opposite.

"Being two-dimensional beings, we could conceive of the third dimension, which is the thickness of the paper. We could not know of the other world so near, nor could we reach it except by going around the edge of the sheet.

"But suppose somebody stuck a pin hole in the paper, through the two worlds on opposite sides. Then we might blunder through, into a new world outside of our knowledge, just as the plane flew through that purple cloud into this strange place. So we must have fallen through a hole in the fourth dimension!"

"And what can we do about it?" Juanita asked.

"I don't know. My theory may be the bunk, anyhow. But there was evidently some phenomenon, either of natural or artificial cause, which swept the plane through the 'continuum' from our world, to this. It may happen again. We must watch. If we see it happen, we may be able to find the cause, and manipulate it to act in reverse to take us home. A slim chance, but our best bet!"

It was not very long before the flames of the wrecked plane died away. Only a mass of bare, blackened metal was left, scattered with charred bones. When the wreckage was cool enough, George found some straps of metal in it which he used as splints on Cann's broken arm. The little man remained unconscious.

For a very long time they stayed there, near the wreck—they did not know how long. George had lost his watch, and Juanita's had been broken. There were no days in this weird world, no sun. The somber, angry crimson of the sky did not change, no luminous object appeared within it.

They grew thirsty, for there was no water to be had. They felt the pains of hunger. They reeled with weariness, and dared not sleep. But the physical hardships, at first, were more endurable than the mental torture.

They were in a strange world, absolutely foreign. It seemed that chemical and physical processes here did not always follow the same course as on their own earth. There was no sun—only the sullen gloom of the crimson sky. No living things except themselves to break the terrible monotony and the oppressive silence.

THEIR minds struggled for an explanation of it all. How had they come here? Was there any chance for escape? What was the meaning of the red sky? Of the huge green crystals that scattered the stony wilderness? Of the inconceivably colossal black mountains?

The air was neither cold not hot, its temperature remained constant. Faint radiation of heat, as well as light, seemed to fall from the scarlet sky. George suggested that the higher atmosphere was filled with some radioactive gas.

Cann never recovered consciousness. Nor did he die of his hurts. He was murdered. It came about in this way.

They must have been in the fantastic world of the adventure for many hours, for both George and Juanita were suffering keenly from hunger and thirst. They were still watching beside Cann. During those long, lonely hours, they had talked a great deal. They felt drawn together by a powerful sympathy, as if they had long been friends.

Both of them were startled immeasurably by the bullet. They had been waiting there a very long time, anxious, alert, waiting. They had been fearful of unknown dangers, fearful of the weird life that this world might possess, fearful even of the dead, endless silence.

The bullet came whining angrily past them. It struck the sheer face of the black cliff behind with an explosive plop, and showered them with fine fragments of broken rock. George started uncontrollably. Juanita half screamed, clapped a hand to her lips and apprehensively grasped the engineer's arm.

"What is it?" she gasped.

"Sounded like a bullet," he said uneasily. "Suppose the inhabitants of this world have firearms?"

"Look!" she whispered suddenly, in a strained voice. "Something moving!"

She pointed out across the cragged wilderness of dull black rock. Following her slender arm, George glimpsed a dark object slowly rising into view behind a twisted black boulder.

A little wisp of bluish smoke floated up beside it. They heard a crashing report, as another bullet sang past them and thudded against the precipice behind them, scattering bits of shattered rock.

"A man!" Juanita cried.

George saw that it was. A human head,

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covered with unkempt black hair and a thick stubble of black beard. A human body rising behind it, grimy, clothed in tattered garments. It was the huge, sullen companion of their voyage.

"Why, it's an old friend!" George whispered. "The man who admired you so much in the plane!" He grinned grimly.

"What does he mean shooting at us?" Juanita cried.

"Guess it won't hurt to ask him," George said. He raised his voice, and shouted at the man. His tones came oddly shrill and strange from his dry throat.

"What do you want?" he called.

The man did not reply. But he left the shelter of the black boulder and stalked cautiously toward them, a huge, terrible figure, a pistol ready in his hand, a heavy automatic.

"What's the idea, shooting at us?" George shouted again, in a shrill, thirst-cracked voice.

"I'm dyin' for a drink," the huge man growled back. "No water in this damn place! I'm thirsty as hell! I've got to drink! Blood!" Again and again, as he ran toward them, he repeated the word in a voice that had become almost a scream. "Blood! Blood! Blood!"

"He's crazy!" George muttered.

Cann still lay unconscious on the bare black rock. When the huge man, charging down upon them, was thirty yards away, he shot again—into the body of the unconscious man. George saw the body jerk at the bullet's impact.

"Oh!" the girl cried out in horror. Then whispered, "Let's run! We can't do anything!"

George took her hand, they ran off along the foot of the towering wall of dull black stone. They were weak from thirst and hunger and weariness; their bodies seemed very heavy. And the black rock over which they fled was so cracked and twisted, pitted with yawning chasms and broken with peaks and boulders and hummocks, that real running was impossible. Many times they stumbled.

They leaped, and crawled, and climbed—jumped bottomless cracks, crept across narrow ledges, clambered up cliffs and boulders.

The huge maniac shouted at them to stop, but they paid no heed. He fired at them twice. The bullets screamed past, and ricocheted among the black summits before them.

"Down!" George cried.

He leaped into a deep crack in the black rock, between two massive, twisted summits, helped Juanita down beside him. They were out of the big man's sight. Swiftly, they stumbled on, down the narrow ravine.

HALF an hour later, when they had covered perhaps five hundred yards, they came up to where they could see the lunatic again. The huge fellow was bent over what was left of inoffensive little Cann, tearing at his body like a hungry wolf. Horrified, they stumbled on again.

It was a long time after they had left the sight of the wreck, when the red rain fell, huge red drops falling from the crimson sky. But they were not water that could be drunk. The great drops, red as blood, were at least a foot in diameter. They came thudding down with terrific force, scattering over the waste of black rock. They did not spatter. They remained lying about in spheroids shaped like drops of mercury, but larger than footballs!

George and Juanita sought shelter in a cave, beneath a sloping ledge of dull black rock. The ground was by no means covered with red globules. No more than two or three fell on every hundred square yards.

"Must be some chemical with an enormously strong surface film," George speculated. "Mercury forms round drops like that, or water dropped in fine dust. But these drops are huge compared to those. Atmospheric conditions here must be quite different from what they are on earth. You remember those big green crystals we've been finding. They must be a sort of snow that falls here, some chemical crystallizing in the air, and falling as snow falls on earth—"

"There's one!" Juanita cried.

She pointed from under the sheltering ledge of dull black rock. A broad, rugged ravine lay before them, a deep, cruel scar that bore witness to the cataclysmic birth of this alien world. On its farther slope, fifty yards away, was a glitter of green, standing out against the dead black of the rock. A huge, six-sided emerald crystal, sparkling and brilliant, like a snow crystal tinted green and enormously magnified.

Another of the riddles of this strange world.

Hours went by. The enormous red drops,

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widely scattered, still thudded down from the sky. The wanderers could see several of the puzzling scarlet spheroids. Suddenly George noticed that those they watched were dwindling in size.

"Look!" he cried. "They're going away. Evaporating, I suppose. Must be some red gas in the sky, which condenses and falls, as rain does on earth. And they evaporate to form clouds again."

Presently a falling red drop happened to strike the green crystal that Juanita had pointed out. George chanced to be watching the green formation speculatively when it occurred. He heard the crashing explosion, saw a vast cloud of luminous purple vapor rise, as if some violent chemical reaction had taken place between the scarlet spheroid and the emerald crystal.

The great burst of shining red violet vapor rushed up as suddenly as the white smoke of a bursting shell. It formed an enormous cloud. The cloud of purple contracted swiftly. But then it seemed to form an immense disk, which they viewed obliquely. A few seconds went by, as they watched in astounded wonder. Then the purple disk contracted swiftly and vanished.

George broke their silence with an excited cry, which came queerly through his dry throat. "The purple circle that came in front of the plane looked just like that." he cried. "We have seen the gate to our world opened again. I am sure of it."

"There's a bird!" Juanita broke in. "See!"

She pointed to a little gray sparrow, flitting uncertainly from where the purple disk had vanished. It circled aimlessly, rose in a wild, bewildered flight, became a little brown speck against the sullen crimson sky and vanished.

"Yes," George said slowly. "The bird came through it. A sparrow from our own world! It blundered through just as the plane did. I wonder—" He fell into silent speculation.

"You wonder what, George?" Juanita asked.

"I must think, dear!"

He patted her hand. A little hand, thin from starvation, red with cuts and scratches gained in their long struggle through the desert of wild black rocks.

Feeling a faint thrill of pleasure at the "dear", she fell silent, and sat watching him with cool gray eyes brightened with a faint light of hope. A long time went by, while the engineer remained silent, immersed in thought. The red rain stopped.

"We might try it!" he said suddenly. "There's no way of telling whether it will work the other way. We are pretty likely to kill ourselves in the experiment. But it's better to take a pretty big risk than end our days here, eh?"

"You mean," Juanita cried tremulously. "You mean—there's a chance to get back home?"

Her gray eyes were wide with excitement and sudden hope.

"A chance," George said. "A bare chance. But better than staying here until we die for want of food and water."

"What is it?" she cried.

"We can find one of the green crystals and dump it on one of the red drops. There ought to be another explosion, and another opening of the gate to our world. I don't understand the formation of the purple disk, of course. But something that results from the explosive union of the red drop and the green crystal seems to break down the barrier between the two worlds, some form of radiation, perhaps.

"Are you willing to try it?"

He looked into her cool gray eyes.

"Of course, George!" She smiled at him—a little smile, wan and strained. It had meant an effort against the weakness of hunger and the torture of thirst. "I'll do anything you want to try. But we must hurry. The red drops, you know, are going away!"

"That's right!" George replied in the hoarse whisper that his voice had become. "We must try it right away."

WEAK and reeling, they rose and tottered out from beneath the sheltering black ledge. Searching down the long ravine, they came upon a few of the scarlet spheroids. Already they were shrunken to the size of a man's fist. They were evaporating swiftly; little streamers of pinkish vapor were rising from them. One of them dwindled and vanished even as they were watching it.

For half an hour they could not find one of the green crystals. Then Juanita's keen eyes discovered one, standing on edge in a narrow crack in the rock. George bent beside the crack, lifted it out—a great, six-pointed star of glistening green, brilliant and transparent, the feathery structure between the points delicate and perfectly symmetrical.

It weighed no more than thirty pounds, but the engineer, weakened by long hardship,

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reeled beneath the burden of it. "Now to find one of the red drops," he muttered.

They struggled on down the ravine, George staggering beneath the weight of a blazing thing that might have been cut from a monster emerald by some gargantuan jeweler, Juanita dragging herself along by his side.

Once they came upon one of the scarlet spheroids. But it was no larger than a baseball when they first saw it. As they staggered up to it, it dwindled swiftly, seeming to hiss like a drop of water on a hot stove. It was gone.

A sound came suddenly from behind them—a hoarse shout, insane, incoherent.

George turned in alarm. He saw a man running after them, a huge man with a bearded face—and red blood on his hands.

An automatic pistol was in his bloodstained hand. As he raised it they broke into a stumbling run. The wild, blood-stained figure behind them shouted, gesticulated. Then they heard shots. Bullets whined and screamed about them.

They ran on, or tried to run. It was a pitiful, staggering pace. George, reeling under the burden of the green crystal, was gasping for breath. His tongue, swollen and leathery, seemed to fill his mouth, choking him. Juanita dragged her feeble, abused body along, keeping back any complaint.

The man running behind them was far stronger; he had had food and drink recently. Swiftly he gained upon them, pausing to fire wildly with the pistol whenever a straight section of the ravine put them in his sight. At last they came to the end of the canyon. Rugged walls of dead black rock rose before them, sheer, impossible to climb. They stopped, looked at it. George dropped the green crystal. He looked at Juanita.

"Well, I guess this means good-by," he managed to articulate, in a whisper. "Hope he makes it merciful. Anyhow, being with you has made it a lot more pleasant."

He took Juanita's hand, looked into her tired eyes, and tried to grin. For the first time in their terrible adventure, Juanita burst into tears. She fell weakly into the engineer's arms, sobbing uncontrollably.

Then George, holding Juanita's sob-shaken body in his arms, looked over her shoulder and saw the thing lying in a little crevice in the black rock, almost at their feet—a red spheroid, nearly a foot in diameter, with pale pink vapors hissing up from about it.

Several of the huge, strange crimson drops must have run together in the crevice, forming a single larger drop which did not evaporate so rapidly. George pushed the girl away, picked up the huge, glistening green crystal that he had dropped and tossed it into the crevice upon the spheroid of scarlet-red liquid.

An explosive outrush of purple vapor hurled them bodily backward against the canyon wall. They crouched there a few seconds, waiting. George had an arm around Juanita's waist, half-supporting her.

Abruptly the red-violet vapor receded from about them. It became a straight wall of purple light, the surface of a great disk.

"Now!" George whispered.

Half carrying Juanita's slight body, he ran forward, leaped into that wall of light.

THE next thing the engineer knew, they were lying sprawled in soft green grass. Juanita had fallen across his body. He sat up with her in his arms, gazed at the world about him, and shed tears of relief and joy. The sky was no longer a sullen, angry red—it was soft and warmly blue.

Cyclopean, nightmare mountains of dull black stone no longer hemmed them in. They were surrounded by the green fields of the San Joaquin Valley. On one side of them a herd of Jersey cows was grazing. Beyond them stood a pleasant-looking farmhouse. On the other side was a fence, and beyond the fence, an unpaved country road.

The noise of an automobile engine reached George's ears. It sounded strange after his ages of silent imprisonment in that other world. A farm truck, loaded with cans of milk, was coming down the road.

"A milk wagon!" he whispered to Juanita. "Let's stop it!" She responded feebly and they struggled over to the fence.

The farmer stopped to investigate these poor, tattered, bruised humans, clinging weakly to the fence, crying for joy. A few minutes later he had given each a few sips of milk from one of the cans, and was taking them to the farmhouse on the hill, where they would find many things that, in their terrible stay in the other world, they had known only in delirious dreams.

"Where on earth have you been?" asked the country doctor, who was called in, and who assured them they would recover.

"You'd never believe it!" was George's answer.

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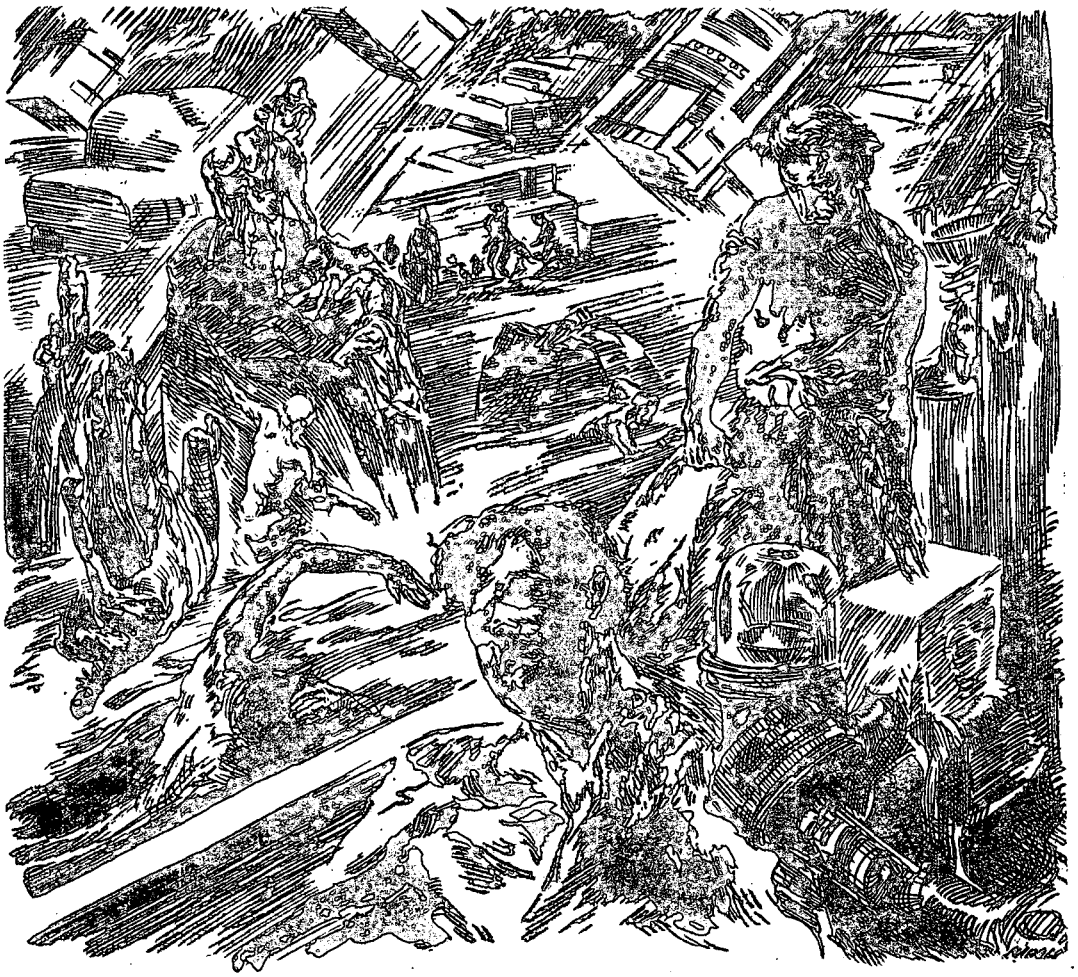
CHAOS

By POLTON CROSS

What happened to fabled Atlantis—to her ultra-civilized people, her amazing science? Nal Folan knew, to his horror!

FOR NEARLY two hours Nal Folan had been seated almost motionless, held in the grip of profound abstract reasoning. In this time only his right hand had moved, turning over the sheets of light durable metal foiling covered with a maze of figures and mathematical computations. He had been working alone in complete silence, a single living man in the midst of a towering array of scientific apparatus.

Finally he laid aside the last sheet of foiling, stretched muscular arms, and got to his feet. He was tall, young, dressed in a brief toga-like costume, his legs and arms almost bare. Nal Folan was a perfect creature of his race. Product of a magnificent science built



The whole city — even the continent — was sinking

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up through generations.

The clock on the far wall of the huge laboratory showed him it was nearly seven in the evening. He nodded to himself, brushed the thick black hair from his forehead with his hand, and then hurried to the door. A short walk down a gleaming corridor and up a flight of emergency steps brought him to the immense flat roof which extended over the entire area of the laboratory. Save for a distant figure the square expanse was deserted.

But the distant figure was all Nal Folan wished to see. He smiled to himself and walked swiftly across the space, his soft-footed sandals making hardly any noise. Before he had covered more than half the distance however the figure turned and began to hurry towards him—a graceful girl in brief garments similar to his own, her black hair streaming to her shoulders.

"Nal!" she murmured, as they seized each others' hands.

He did not answer for a moment. Gently he kissed her oval face, looked for a moment into the darkness of her eyes. Then putting his arm about her waist he walked with her to the high metal rail which entirely encircled the roof parapet.

"I thought you'd forget," she said, smiling up at him. "With so many other things on your mind."

"It would take more than wave-mechanics to make me forget you, Mydia," he answered. "You said seven o'clock and the laboratory roof, and that's enough for me. You didn't have any difficulty in getting here, did you?"

"Not particularly. I used the stairway from the street."

He nodded. "Good. As long as we remain up here on the roof we're within bounds. But we can't go down into the laboratory, of course. Visitors are not allowed—not even when they are as beautiful as you are. Old man Grifa would go crazy if he found the rule had been broken."

THEY were both quiet for a moment. Over in the west the sun had vanished in the magenta and orange of the warm spring evening. The sky was pale blue and empty, a star or two winking here and there. No wind stirred. From this high eminence the young man and woman had an uninterrupted view of the city, a metropolis wider than it was high, nowhere rising above three stories except in the case of this laboratory.

The buildings were all of white metal, incorrodible, gleaming now with the strings of lights in the windows. Faintly, drifting on the still air, came the hum of the mighty engines which controlled the aircraft, the radio-television systems, the atomic powerhouses, and the climate.

"Not a bad city to live in," Nal Folan commented at length, his elbows on the rail and his young, powerful body half stooped as he gazed towards the west.

"Atlantis?" The girl smiled. "It's a wonderful city, Nal, and you know it. Yet even with our scientific perfection I suppose there is still a good deal to be learned. You and your wave-mechanics theory, for instance."

Nal Folan meditated, his keen gray eyes shifting to the distant Sphinx and Pyramids just outside the city. The Sphinx was a recent creation, a gigantic idol of stone etched out by scientific engineers, a traditional god which the race still worshipped despite their immense grasp of scientific realities. The Pyramids were for a very different purpose. They housed the ashes of the city fathers who had at last come to the end of their three-centuries.

"Just what," the girl asked presently, "are you trying to do in the laboratory, Nal? You've only given me vague hints. It's important, isn't it?"

He straightened up and regarded her. "Important enough, yes. Grifa and the others are coming tomorrow morning to see my demonstration. If it is successful I may become the Third Physicist. After that, a few more years say, and then I'll have the same position as Grifa himself. That's worth striving for."

"That I know," Mydia said. "You've mentioned it many times. But it still doesn't explain what you are *doing*. Please remember that I'm only a very commonplace machine-minder in the climatic powerhouse and—"

"Commonplace!" Nal caught her shoulders and shook her gently. "If beauty were commonplace, which it isn't even in this city, you might be right. Certainly not otherwise. My work?" He seemed suddenly conscious of her question. "It is a method of proving that an electron-area is not limited to being merely a microscopic probability."

Mydia looked at him solemnly, her pretty face troubled. Then she sighed. "It serves me right," she said. "I shouldn't have asked you. I don't know the first thing about

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electron-areas."

"Then why bother?" he asked, smiling. "I asked you to come here after your machine shift so that we could talk—not of mathematics and probabilities but about ourselves. You and me—our coming marriage—the things we intend to do."

Mydia was silent, looking down at the city. Men and women were going back and forth. Silent vehicles skimmed up and down the broad avenues. To the east the emptiness of the sky was broken as an exploration flyer, detailed to seek out fresh lands for expansion, came down on the guiding radio-beam.

"You—haven't changed your mind?" Nal whispered, frowning.

The girl laughed. "Of course not! Can't I be silent for a moment or two without you thinking that? I was just considering. It's so *safe* now for us to be married, to have children, and not be afraid that they will be destroyed. It was so different in our grandparents' time."

NAL nodded, reminded of events of two generations ago, six hundred years. At that time the entire race had fled through the void from the fourth planet nearest the sun. Gigantic geological changes and the consequent evaporation of their normal air and oceans had driven them out to this safer world.

Now they could look upon the planet they had left and see the merciless corrosion of ferric oxide going on before their eyes. But here they were safe, established. In this one city, the only city so far on Earth, the third world, was encompassed the entire nucleus of the mighty race—twenty thousand of them.

"We have to expand, colonize, marry, intermarry—spread ourselves all over the world," Nal murmured, repeating the words of Brada, their monarch. "That is right and as it should be. We are not upsetting anybody who normally belongs to this planet. Except for us it's a dead world."

The twilight deepened. The girl moved slightly.

"Are we going home, Nal, or do you intend to spend more time in the laboratory?"

He seemed to make up his mind about something before he replied.

"Mydia, we share most of our joys and sorrows, don't we?" he asked.

"All of them," she answered, her eyes luminous.

"Then I'm going to show you what I'm up to," he decided. "Be hanged to rules and regulations! They can't say anything to me, anyway. I'm too important a research scientist for that. Come below and see for yourself."

He caught her arm and she followed promptly across the roof and down the emergency staircase into the silent corridor which led to the department in which he had been working. Normally the staff in the building ceased work at five. Only special research, such as Nal had been engaged upon, made it necessary to delay beyond that hour.

"We're quite alone," he said, as he ushered her into the gigantic hall-like room. "Come along."

He closed the door behind her and in wonderment she gazed about her upon the towering giants of instruments. Though she was accustomed to scientific equipment in her daily work as a machine-minder she had never before encountered such apparatus as here. Most of it was for research work, or the product thereof, and therefore not in general use but reserved exclusively for secret experiments.

Finally Nal stopped beside the bench at which he had been working. He gestured briefly to the metal foils with the mathematics thereon and then waved to what seemed to be a highly polished ball standing on the summit of a glittering rod, its base firmly bolted to the metal flooring.

"That," he said, "is the product of these figures."

Mydia contemplated the object for a moment or two and then she looked vaguely disappointed.

"Not very—impressive, is it?"

Nal smiled. "It isn't meant to be. In fact, the fewer gadgets there are around it, the better. It connects to the switchboard here" —he nodded to it—"and this blue push-button controls it. The button is the power-feeder. The thing itself is a converter-globe, made to react directly on the etheric waves of matter."

"How?" Mydia questioned, puzzled.

"Well, it—" Nal broke off in surprise as the visiphone buzzed suddenly. Puzzled, he pressed the switch which opened the audiophone. Simultaneously, a face remarkable for its massive strength and mature wisdom appeared on the screen.

"Oh, there you are, Nal." The deep,

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genial voice of Grifa, the First Physicist of Atlantis, came over the speakers. "I'd like you to come to my apartment for a few words. About your demonstration tomorrow."

"Er—yes, sir." Nal moved his hand behind his back so Mydia would understand to keep out of range of the instrument's visual pickup. "I'll be glad to, sir. Right away?"

"Yes. I won't keep you long."

Nal switched off and glanced ruefully at the girl. She breathed an expressive sigh of relief.

"Good job the old boy decided to 'phone instead of coming here personally," she said.

"I'll have to go." Nal looked momentarily annoyed. "But I don't expect I'll be long. Then I'll come back and finish what I was going to tell you. You don't mind waiting?"

"Of course not. Even *looking* at this place passes the time."

FOLAN nodded and strode quickly across the laboratory. Left to herself the girl stood gazing about her, and finally she returned to a study of the polished, harmless-looking globe. It still didn't appear much of an achievement for eighteen months of concentrated effort. Her thoughts began to wander—playfully, then dangerously. The curiosity that is within every human being was getting the mastery. The blue button, Nal had said. To press it on and off surely couldn't do any harm? It looked tempting.

She passed her fingertip gently over it, considered, and then she pressed it sharply on and off. Inside the metallic globe there was a faint whirring sound like blades spinning round in heavy air. Since the effect ceased the moment she released the button she tried again and jabbed the button inwards more sharply.

Then to her horror the button top slipped just under the socket edge and remained jammed!

Panic got her immediately. She fiddled and fumbled with her fingernails to get the button back into the central position, but it remained obdurate. Wildly she glanced about her for something thin and sharp. Above her the mystic metal globe had started to glow and the ghostly whirring had become a steady, constant sound.

A pair of forceps on the bench seemed the most likely thing. She dived for them and then stopped dead, stupefied. Suddenly her left arm had been painlessly, completely amputated from the elbow! The incredible horror of the fact paralysed her for a moment. Then she turned her head to stare at the impartial, glowing globe.

Suddenly it was no longer a globe. It was a blazing sun and she was infinitely far out in space. There were a few seconds before the air inside her body exploded outwards in the unpressured void, and then Mydia had literally blown to atoms a million miles from Earth.

Nal Folan found the First Psychicist in his most genial mood in the big, quietly furnished apartment he occupied in the center of the city. Grifa himself was a tall, eagle-nosed man, white-haired now, but with all the strength of two hundred years. When Nal entered he was busy at his desk under the flood of cold light radiance in the glazed ceiling.

"Come in, Nal, sit down." He motioned to a chair and then set aside his work and considered the young man across the desk. "I understand that you are ready to make your demonstration tomorrow morning?"

"Of the electrical converter, yes," Nal agreed. "I've worked it out to the last detail. I think it will fulfill all I've claimed for it—and thanks for giving me the time to finish it."

"It is the purpose of us Elders of Atlantis to allow promising young scientists to develop their theories," Grifa smiled. "Otherwise, how could science expand? However, I sent for you so that I can have all the details. I want to think the matter over before tomorrow."

"I have everything recorded, sir. I'll go and—"

Grifa raised a hand as Nal half rose. "Sit down, boy. Never mind the actual technique—just give me the outlines. That will be all I'll need for the moment. I haven't even the vaguest outline of your plan, yet, remember."

"Well, sir, I'm seeking to prove that it is possible to study the exact poition of an electron, instead of the present annoying condition where in you can't know the position and velocity of an electron simultaneously."

"In other words you have devised a means whereby the basis of all matter can be studied without, say, the very action of light impact itself dislodging the electron before it can be studied?"

"I am dealing, sir, in probability," Nal said quietly. "An electron, as we understand it,

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is purely a probability. It is within a given area of waves of inconceivable smallness. We cannot say for certain that it is *here* or *there*. We assume the *probability* that it is.

"The waves in which an electron is assumed to exist veer off into space, maybe into other dimensions, which makes the job of pinning down the actual position of the electron itself all the more difficult."

"Quite so," Grifa conceded. "And what have you done about it?"

"I've devised a converter. It emits energy waves which are identical with those existing round the 'probable' position of the electron, at which point of course the waves are densest. Therefore, instead of a central core of tremendous energy which weakens as it travels—as all waves weaken as they travel from the source—I maintain the same energy strength for any distance."

GRIFA looked astonished for a moment. "What you really mean is that instead of the electron wave being infinitesimally small it can be made as large as—as you wish?"

"That is it exactly," Nal agreed, "because the original energy is carried onwards and outwards from the core for any distance we wish. It means that instead of having to try and examine an electron in a microscopic area we can have an area of several feet, yards, miles, whatever we wish. It makes the study of an electron wave and the electron itself absolutely possible."

The First Physicist was silent for a long time, brooding. Then he got to his feet and shook his gray head slowly.

"I don't quite like it," he muttered. "The electron-probability, Nal, is the basis of all known matter. It operates in its small area by natural laws and because of that matter remains stable. If the area be extended it means that the particular piece of matter involved will lose its cohesion. It might even be transplanted! Did you stop to think of that?"

"I did," Nal assented. "That is why I have devised a spring button instead of a normal switch. The particular matter I intend to 'treat' tomorrow will only be exposed to the influence for a split second. Then we can study the result. Naturally, only split-second energy release can be used at first until we know what we are dealing with, otherwise we might unlock matter itself."

Grifa became silent again, gazing pensively out of the window. Then after a while he frowned and motioned Nal to his side.

"What do you make of that?" the First Physicist asked, pointing.

Nal studied the view of the lighted city, but it was only by degrees that he became conscious of something amiss with it. It looked as though a V-shaped wedge had blotted out one section of the lights with a darkness which was absolute. At the very apex of the wedge was a tiny glowing point.

Even as he tried to understand the mystery, something passed through the building in which Grifa and he were standing. It was a curious surging motion as though an immense wind had passed through solid matter and then subsided again.

"Great heavens," Nal whispered suddenly, his eyes suddenly becoming round with alarm. "That point is approximately where the research laboratory is. Surely it isn't possible that—Mydia!" he breathed. "But—but she *couldn't* have—!"

"What in cosmos are you talking about?" Grifa snapped, seizing Nal's arm tightly. "What's wrong, boy? You're not suggesting that something has happened to your converter, are you?"

"I—I don't know. I hardly dare think—"

"What do you mean by 'Mydia'? What has a woman to do with it?"

Nal turned suddenly. "I've got to find out, sir."

He headed from the apartment with long strides and the savant followed him. When they reached the street they found it jammed with milling crowds, and from here the amazing V-fault across the city was more than ever obvious. The buildings within this segment had entirely vanished. Those on the fringes of it were neatly, flawlessly, bisected.

"Come on!" Grifa snapped, pushing his way through the men and women with Nal at his side. "There's something devilishly wrong here."

With the realization that they were taking a desperate risk they hurried to the outermost edge of the V-section, but once they passed into it they experienced no ill effects. There was solid ground, smooth as the face of a black mirror, from which all traces of buildings and the people who had been within them had utterly disappeared.

Without commenting, though his face was grim, Grifa hurried along the smoothness towards the solitary point of light which

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shone like a star. Then presently he slowed up, Nal beside him, as both of them became conscious of surging waves beating about them again.

"There's only one answer to this," Grifa snapped. "That converter of yours is working—too well! We'd better get out of its influence. We seem to be in a direct line. That point of light is where the laboratory ought to be."

"I'm going on, sir," Nal said grimly. "I left a girl in that laboratory—Mydia Fro. I intend to marry her. I've got to find her."

"You left a—"

NAL did not wait to hear what more his outraged superior might have to say. He sped down the black, shining vista towards the solitary spot of light, oblivious to whatever danger there might be. In time he realized that the entire front of the research laboratory had disappeared and that the floors were visible sectionally with that glowing ball on the topmost floor of all.

Nal raced through the entrance way of the building and up the stairs, finally burst into the laboratory itself. All the lights were out. What illumination there was came from that baleful ball atop its glittering pole. It was bright amethyst in color, setting up a tautening static in the air.

Appalled, Nal fell back before that baleful circle. He looked about him anxiously. Of Mydia there was no sign. Breathing hard he raced over to the switchboard and found the jammed button. He beat on it frenziedly—and then stopped, his attention arrested by a new and horrifying sight. At his feet lay a perfectly severed forearm, appearing just as though it were cast in wax. He did not touch it. He just stared bewildered.

Then, his rugged face ghastly in the lavender glow, Grifa came to his side, panting for breath.

"Too late now for recriminations, Nal," he said. "You say there was a woman in here? Obviously that arm belonged to her. It must have been severed by a shift in electronic paths—cleanly, painlessly. In other words, the probability that her forearm belonged to the rest of her arm suddenly ceased to exist and the forearm materialized elsewhere—on the floor here."

"But where is she?" Nal panted, staring around. "What's become of her?"

"I don't know, any more than one can ever predict where a probability wave is. As to what happened, this button—"

The First Physicist turned on it savagely—but at the same instant he found himself quite unhurt on a rising stretch of ground outside the city. Nal was beside him, not a lock of his hair disturbed, not one shade of alteration in his horrified expression.

Grifa did not say anything immediately. He was contemplating the city and grappling with profound issues at the same time. From this rocky eminence it looked as though the city were splashed with inky holes where buildings had utterly vanished and left smooth, mirrorlike ground. There was a disturbance in the air too, a wraith or so of wind, which in a climate automatically controlled at dead level calmness could only mean one thing—the Climatic machines had been affected.

"Nal," the First Physicist said finally, gripping the young man's arm, "you've released something which we can't stop—or at least that woman Mydia Fro must have done so. The button jammed and the converter ran on and on. That means that all the time it runs electron waves extend their area, in the way you outlined, and their extension shifts other waves, and so on ad infinitum.

The whole mass of probabilities which make up matter as we know it is in a state of complete flux. For instance, while we were in the laboratory the probability that we *were* there collapsed before the probability that we were *here*—and here we came, on the instant, without any conception of transit. That, I imagine, is explainable by an electron leaping from one orbit to another without ever being in the space between. No gulf is there to be crossed. One state dissolves and another appears, remote from the original state.

"At any moment," Grifa finished somberly, "the probability that we are here may collapse again and we may be—anywhere. In the former state matter was more or less stable. Now it is stable no longer." Grifa clenched his fists and stared upwards at fast forming clouds. "I said it was something we couldn't stop," he muttered. "But we've got to! It can mean the end of the world—the probability, even, that the world itself does not exist, or anything upon it.

"Come with me," he finished curtly, jerking his gray head.

Nal said nothing, but he turned and followed the savant down the rocky slope

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which led to the pock-marked city. They entered it by skirting its edges, avoiding the streets which were now thronged with surging, chattering people trying to discover what was happening. Many of the buildings still stood unharmed, including the one in which Grifa had his headquarters and, deep down in the basement, his private laboratory.

HE ENTERED it in a few minutes with Nal behind and switched on the lights.

"We are no safer from probability waves down here than we are anywhere else," he said, "but at least we may have a chance to hit back. We can't approach that converter-globe again without risking destruction or transplantation to heaven knows where. So the obvious answer is to destroy it from a distance by vibratory waves."

Turning, he went over to one of the instruments with which the laboratory was filled. He paused at length before an apparatus which reminded Nal of a telescopic reflector.

"When we came from our home planet," the savant said, operating switches which made the instrument turn on a massive central pillar, "we brought three of these vibratory guns with us in case there should be dangerous life on this world.

"We never needed to use them and this one has remained in case of attack from space. It directs a molecular vibration upon any given object at any distance, passing through intervening matter in the form of an X-ray. Now, let us see what the predictor tells us."

He studied a balanced needle swinging in a vacuum globe and operated more controls. Nal watched the needle turn gently until it pointed exactly parallel with the direction of the gun barrel.

"The needle is now pointing to the converter-globe two miles away," Grifa explained. "Any great center of electricity attracts the needle—or if need be any particular mass of matter."

He broke off. "We are dead-sighted on that abominable creation of yours. Let's see what we can do with it."

Switches moved. Power hummed. Nothing of a visible nature left the gigantic projector, but after a second or two the needle in the vacuum-globe suddenly jumped into a vertical position and became steady. Grifa gave a deep sigh and stood back.

"It's destroyed," he said thankfully. "The electrical mass is no longer there. The needle proves it. We had better look for ourselves."

The hurried out of the laboratory together and to the main room on the ground floor. From the window they gazed out beyond the milling people and caverns of darkness to the spot where a glowing point of light had been. It had vanished. There was void.

"And—and should that cure the trouble?" Nal asked at last.

"Perhaps." The First Physicist turned from the window as an eddying gust of wind hurled unexpected rain against it. Outside, lightning blazed transiently. "Perhaps," he repeated moodily. "At least it means that the effect cannot go on being created. What remains can only be from the initial trouble and ultimately the balance should settle down. We destroyed it in the only way we could. Cutting off the power would not have done it. It was alive within itself."

"And—Mydia Fro?" Nal asked somberly, then he turned and looked sharply at the desk where Grifa usually worked. In a sudden blur the desk vanished and left empty floor.

"So," Grifa muttered, "the effect still goes on. So I suppose it will do until every displaced probability wave has found its proper position and a new order of things is established. It may take years—centuries—aeons."

A clap of thunder drowned the remainder of his words. Nal looked about him dully, still almost bereft of the power to think. In fact only two realizations had any deep significance for him. One was that Mydia had gone, he knew not where. The other, that he had brought about the destruction of the city he loved.

Then with devastating abruptness the storm which had been gathering since the breakdown of the Climatic machines burst in a deluge of rain against the window. It rattled violently, rattled again to the booming roar of a hurricane wind. Nal turned a grim face and stared outside. Across the broad avenue three giant buildings dissolved even as lightning illumined them. For a split second there was a vision of swirling humanity fleeing for shelter—

THE ground trembled as deep down under the earth probabilities gave way to new probabilities and matter in places ceased to be, or was transferred elsewhere.

The lights in the glazed ceiling died and a

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moment afterwards the visiphone buzzed for attention. Grifa strode across to it on the wall, his way lighted by a chaotic blaze of forked lightning. As he pressed the switch no face appeared on the glass screen but a troubled voice chattered to him.

"Excellence, I have been trying to make contact with the king. Probably he has been killed. There are none left who can take control. This is the First Adviser speaking. What am I to do? What has happened?

"I—I have seen things appear and disappear without reason. The latest reports from our exploration fliers state that even our traditional Sphinx and Pyramids have been transported two thousand miles to the middle of an empty desert! How could that come about?"

"The explanation is scientific, my friend—a gigantic scientific flaw," Grifa responded. "There is nothing you, or I, or anybody can do about it. Watch out for your own safety, until the disturbance subsides. The whole basic structure of matter is undermined."

The communication was cut off suddenly. An entire wall of the building dissolved and Grifa and Nal found themselves battered by cyclonic winds and saturating rain before they even had a chance to move. The First Physicist went sprawling. Nal seized him and dragged him to his feet again.

"We'll have to find shelter!" he shouted into the savant's ear.

Drenched, Grifa gazed at the chain lightning whiplashing the raging heavens. He shook his head.

"There'll be no shelter for us, son—not for days or weeks, maybe not for years. Everything in this area is toppling into a new balance. The effect will go throughout the planet, progressively, maybe even into space itself for generations yet to come."

"But we might survive," Nal said desperately. "Some of us have got to, if only to perpetuate the science of our race."

"Some of us will," the savant agreed. "But as I see it, after the horror that has been released they will almost certainly be witless savages, groping for shelter in a shattered, bewildering world. Science and education always vanish before elemental fury, Nal"

The earth gulped and heaved. Both men staggered heavily amidst the swamping rain. Far away to the east, momentarily lighted by the lightning, was a clear silver line carrying with it a roar which penetrated even the storm.

"That's—that's the ocean!" Nal gasped, fascinated. "It must mean that our whole city is sinking—perhaps even the continent itself. It's a tidal wave! It'll crash down on us! Do you understand, sir?" he shouted. "Then you say some of us will survive!"

"Some will, as the waters subside." The First Physicist stared at the advancing line for a moment. "What you have done, Nal, will be long remembered," he said at length. "Those who come after us—generations as yet unborn—will wonder whence came a Sphinx and Pyramids in the middle of a desert. Whither went a race of scientists who must have existed in this part of the world.

"Unexplained things in unexplained places—eternal riddles. Mighty objects that could never have been moved by mortal agency. All the work of shifting probabilities which began this night."

Grifa seemed suddenly possessed of visionary power in the face of imminent death.

"Perhaps the perfect balance will never be found. New probabilities will appear like bubbles in the space-time continuum, but with gradually diminishing frequency. Human beings and animals will vanish from the midst of their fellows without trace. Ocean ships which must come again in course of time will sail and never be heard of again. Airplanes will hurtle through the sky and into unexplained extinction.

"Out in space stars will come and go for no known reason. Shiftings—probabilities, until the perfect balance is attained when thermodynamic equilibrium is reached in the unthinkably distant future."

SUDDENLY Grifa was gone, transposed by a probability shift to a lonely planet circling Antares. For a second or two he gazed upon the lonely, deathly world on which he stood and then he died, torn asunder by the explosion of air within him.

Nal Folan, still on earth, gazed stupidly at the spot where the First Physicist had been. Then he glanced up at the roaring waters sweeping down upon what remained of tottering Atlantis.

He started to run. He had no idea where, over rocks and fallen metal, with the mighty tide surging irresistibly behind him.

Then it had vanished. Nal was reeling through long rank grass under a calm moon and stars. Nowhere was there a sign of Atlantis, of havoc, of tidal wave. Probability

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had decided that he should be an unknown distance from the spot where Deluge had struck.

Survivors? The thought twisted through his mind. Perhaps others would come, to begin anew the task of building a race, which in turn would forget the past with each succeeding generation, which in turn would wonder upon the marvels, the mysteries, the unexplained riddles in the world about them.

Forever more there must be a planet in which there was no certainty, from which there would one day spring a Principle of Indeterminacy, a world wherein one might step from the everyday into a new probability and be gone from fellowmen forever; where one might fly the heavens and never be heard of again. Where one might sail the oceans and never reach port. Where one might find the tombs of Egyptian kings in Pyramids that had once held the ashes of the dignitaries of Atlantis. . .

Nal smiled wearily. These were things for the future. For the moment he had survived. Perhaps he would continue to survive, to hand down records which in course of time would become legends of a master-race of Atlantis which had perished in the Deluge. . . . He had to find others of his own kind somewhere—somewhere in this calm, unknown land where the moonlight shone silver on softly waving grass.

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ANASTOMOSIS

By CLYDE BECK

PROFESSOR Stephen Bates was not in a mood to be interrupted this afternoon. Ordinarily he did not mind particularly. With two younger-than-teen-age children in the house, one either got used to interruptions and noise in general, or one went mad.

And madness is a luxury too expensive to be indulged in by a young associate professor of mathematics who is expecting his advance to full professorship at any time. Especially with the same two children to be fed and clothed and put to school and have their mumps and measles paid for.

Ordinarily Professor Bates did his work in his lecture room and office and did not bring it home with him. He had given that up in the earlier years of his marriage, at about the time that young James had won the ability to open doors by himself. He had often pondered the ease with which children learned the trick of opening doors, and how long it took them to learn the trick of closing them properly.

He could hear doors now—the twanging of the spring as the screen door of the porch opened, the clash as it shut, the rattle of the latch of the outside kitchen door and the slam of it closing, the bang of the swinging door in the kitchen against the wall, then

PROFESSOR BATES INSISTED ONLY FOUR DIMENSIONS

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The little men carried Bates up the steps and tossed him into the cube

four or five soft thudding noises as it swung to and fro on its hinges.

One good thing about James, he reflected—he would never catch you at anything embarrassing. You always heard him coming in plenty of time.

He was coming now. His steps sounded in the passage—as if Martha had taken him to the blacksmith last time instead of to the shoe store. Bates bent lower over his writing, vaguely hoping that the steps would go on past his study door and up the stairs—vainly, of course. The study door clattered its latch and banged against the wall and James confronted his father.

His father bent even more closely over his desk and wrote busily, pretending to be too absorbed in his work to notice the intrusion. Such subtlety was wasted upon James.

"Pop!" he shouted. "What's a spatio-temporal anastomosis?"

Bates stared. "What's a *what*?" he asked.

"Spatio-temporal anastomosis. That's what the man said."

COULD EXIST, BUT HE WAS IN FOR A RUDE AWAKENING!

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"He was giving you some double-talk, then. There isn't any such thing. It's nonsense."

James pondered this abrupt answer for a few seconds. He knew better. It wasn't nonsense—he had seen it. Still, in his nine years he had already learned that it was not always wise to insist too strongly on one's own experience in the face of convention—especially when convention was implemented by parental authority.

"Well," he compromised, "if there *was* one, would it be dangerous? Would it be a bomb, or anything?"

"Certainly not," said Professor Bates. "Look, why don't you stop bothering me? Why don't you go outside and play with Alice?"

"Aw, girls don't know how to play. Besides, she's too little."

"Well, go on outside anyway. And close the door."

"Oh, okay," said James, and closed the door. Bates winced. He listened to the progress down the passage, through the swinging door, through the kitchen door, through the screen door, and exhaled the breath he didn't know he had been holding. Then he turned again to his work.

If this had not been so important, Bates might have had more attention to spare for the curious term which his son had used. He might have even gone outside with him and found out the proper answer to his question. As it was, he found out anyhow, but not in the way he might have preferred. However, this was a piece of urgent work.

He had been called upon, on rather short notice, to address a senior seminar upon the topic of hyperdimensional geometry. The group met on Monday evening. He must have the paper ready for the department secretary to type out the first thing Monday morning. That was why he was working on it at home on a Saturday afternoon. And the composition required his whole attention.

It was not easy to give due consideration to the material of his topic and yet make it clear that hyperdimensionality was a mere convention, a convenient abstraction, and that dimensions other than the three of space and the fourth of time must not be imagined to have an actual physical existence. That was why he was impatient of interruption.

If he had had any idea that such a thing as a spatio-temporal anastomosis could exist he would have been among the first to be interested, but he supposed it to be just another of the sometimes amazing words that young boys pick up on the street or at school.

MEANWHILE, James had returned to the garage. The little old man was still there, and so was his box. The man looked up hopefully as James approached.

"Ah," he said, "and the Pop?"

"Pop says it's okay."

"That is good. You will give the Pop my thanks, perhaps? It is only for a few moments, for the half of an hour, that I wish to leave the mechanism in your outbuilding. I must go into the town, and the spatio-temporal anastomosis must remain near the place where it came through, otherwise the focusing of the power beam is difficult. And besides, it is awkward to carry. But remember, please, the anastomosis is not to be tampered with."

It is questionable how much of this speech James was able to comprehend, but he understood the purport of the last sentence at least. He had heard the like before.

"Sure," he said. "I won't hurt it any."

"Certainly not," the little old man replied. "It is quite the contrary I am thinking of. You understand? Good, and I thank you again. So, for a few moments, good-by."

James watched the little old man walk to the end of the alley and turn toward the center of the town. He was a queer-looking person, not very much taller than James, though he was old. He was old enough to have white hair, even if his face was not much wrinkled.

But it was an old face, especially the eyes. The eyes were old-looking and wise. He moved quickly, with small, sharp motions, like a bird, James thought, and his clothes, of some smooth shiny stuff that you thought you could see through and then saw you couldn't, fitted him closely and neatly even when he moved, like feathers.

When the man was out of sight, James hurried back into the garage. The box stood on the concrete floor where the old man had left it—the spatio-temporal anastomosis, rather, but it looked like a box to James. It was a square black box, some three feet on a side, made of blackness—made of something, anyway, that was blacker than anything James had ever seen. It was blacker than soot, dead-black and smooth as glass, but not shiny. It sparkled, though, with little spinning flecks of queer-colored light that were never just where you were looking.

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James walked 'round and 'round the cube, following the swirling dance of light-particles which always eluded his eye. He began to be dizzy. He would probably have become bored with the black cube in a few minutes and have gone out into the sunshine to practice with his yo-yo if Alice had not come in.

Alice was his sister, three years younger than he and therefore of no consequence. Nevertheless James immediately felt a sense of possession in respect to the cube.

"What's that?" Alice asked.

"It's a special temple—it's a box, silly."

"Silly, yourself! I know it's a box. But what's in it?"

"There isn't anything in it. And you leave it alone, too. It's not to be tampered with, the man said."

"Aw, I won't hurt it. But I bet there is something in it anyway. What's the use of a box with nothing in it, silly?"

"There isn't anything in this box."

"I bet there is and you just won't let on. I dare you to open it up and show me!"

James was tired of the argument. "It doesn't open," he said frigidly.

"If it doesn't open and there's nothing in it, I bet it isn't a box at all. I bet *you* don't know *what* it is!"

"It is too a box!" James shouted.

"I bet it isn't. Show me!"

"It's a box, and it doesn't open, and there's nothing in it," James stated categorically. "You can look in it and see." This was true; at that instant his eye had fallen upon two small holes of lesser blackness, a couple of inches apart, on an upper edge of the cube.

He paused. Suppose Alice were right. Suppose there were something in the box. Suppose there were a whole carton of bubble gum in it. He applied his eyes to the holes and looked.

There was a carton of bubble gum in the box.

James was a believer in direct action whenever it was possible. He reached into the cube, seized the bubble gum and pulled it out.

IN HIS study Professor Bates was finishing his paper. He completed the last sentence with decisive strokes of his pen, turned to the first page and began to read it through. He inserted two commas, substituted "pointless" for "absurd" after a moment's deliberation, changed a comma to a semicolon and shuffled the sheets together with a sigh of satisfaction. He fastened them with a wire clip, put them into a manila folder, and inserted the folder into his brief-case.

Just then Professor Bates noticed that house and yard were invested with an ominous silence. He was never entirely at ease about the children when Martha was not there to keep them under her expert eye, and he knew that silence was one of the worst signs.

Martha should be back from the sale at Lacey's by now. He looked at his watch. He had spent longer over the lecture than he had realized. She was having trouble with the generator again, most likely. And the kids were probably up to something catastrophic. With a mental jolt Bates descended from the stimulating field of scientific speculation and became a harassed family man.

He received a further jolt when, looking from the window, he saw a glittering sphere four feet in diameter emerge from behind the garage and dance airily down the alley. Then it swung around and he saw that it was a huge rubber balloon with his daughter behind it, still blowing.

James sprang from the garage in pursuit. The balloon burst with a bang clearly audible in the house and Alice sat down suddenly and hard. The expression of cosmic surprise left her face and she began to wail vigorously.

"Serves you right!" shouted James. "I told you not to blow it up so big!"

As he went out to comfort his child, Bates sighed with relief. At least the terrible silence was over. He found her startled rather than hurt, and the professor was easily able to quiet her screams and stop her tears. When this was done he had time to wonder.

"Where did you ever get a balloon of that size?" he asked.

"It was in the magic-box."

"The magic-box?"

James explained. "She means the Special Temple Nasty Moses."

For a wild moment Bates considered the possibility of his children's having taken up the practice of diabolism. Then he remembered the phrase that James had used in his study.

"Show it to me!" he directed.

"Oh goody!" cried Alice. "Maybe there's another balloon in it!" Bates reached for her flying form, but she eluded him. When he and James entered the garage she was al-

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ready at the peep-holes in the cube. Bates watched in horror as her arm vanished in the shimmering blackness up to the shoulder and emerged, her hand clutching a large limp rubber balloon. She ran from the garage, blowing vigorously. James was prevented from chasing her by his father's firm grip on his shoulder.

"See here, young man," said Bates, "suppose you tell me what this is all about!"

James wriggled, but his father kept his hold and continued to regard him sternly.

"Well, the little old guy said could he leave it here and I said I'd have to ask you and you said it wasn't dangerous and I said okay and he said thanks and he left it here."

"You have an oblique way of asking permission sometimes," Bates remarked. "What little old guy?"

"I don't know. I came in the garage and he was there and it was there. And he said—"

"Never mind! Where did he go?"

"Down town. He walked funny, like an old chicken. He said he'd be back in a half hour. He talked funny too." James giggled.

BATES considered this information for a moment, meanwhile regarding the black cube suspiciously. "So that's a spatio-temporal anastomosis!" he said. "I don't believe it."

"Yeah, that's what the man said. And you look in through those two little holes there, and anything you want is in it, and you just pull it out."

"It's absurd," said Professor Bates.

"Yeah. But look at all the stuff we got out of it." James pointed to a heap on the floor of the garage. There were a stack of cartons of bubble gum a foot or so high, a pair of roller skates, several dolls, an air rifle, a set of boxing gloves, a skipping rope, a doll house and much else besides. Bates's mind reeled. All of these things were very new, and he had seen none of them before among the children's possessions.

"First we thought it was only bubble gum," James said, "and then Alice saw a doll in it, and then we found out it was anything we wanted." He moved toward the cube, but his father held him back.

"I could use a double slug of Scotch," Bates said, and peered into the cube. The Scotch was there. Bates seized the glass and tossed it off at a gulp.

Outside there was a loud flat bang, then a soft thud and a sound of weeping.

"You go on out with your sister." Bates shoved the reluctant James toward the door. "I'll take care of this thing. It might be dangerous after all; don't either of you come in here. And when your little old guy comes back I'll take care of him too."

Left alone, Bates regarded the empty glass which was still in his hand. He set it down carefully on the workbench. It looked like a very ordinary glass, with a slight amount of amber fluid left in the bottom and a few oily drops draining smoothly down the sides. It was good Scotch, too.

"I might as well have said a case while I was at it," Bates muttered. He approached the black cube and looked cautiously through the holes. There was no light in the cube, yet the case of Scotch was clearly visible, surrounded by and apparently resting upon absolute blackness. He could see the maker's name and shipping marks stamped on the wood. It was his favorite brand.

He advanced his hand gingerly. There was no sensation when it made contact with the black surface, but he could see it inside, reaching toward the case. The wood felt real. His hand flinched as it encountered a sharp splinter. He took a deep breath, plunged both hands into the blackness, seized the case and lifted it out.

Bates took up a heavy screwdriver from the bench and pried off a part of the lid. There were bottles inside, full ones. He took one of them out, uncorked it, and poured some of the contents into the glass which still stood on the workbench. It was Scotch all right.

Having emptied the glass, Bates sat down on the case to consider the implications. Ordinarily he was of a healthily skeptical turn of mind, but now he was ready to believe almost anything. All right, suppose it were a spatio-temporal anastomosis.

If that meant anything, it meant an orifice connecting two or more different space-time systems, a locus of intercommunication between such systems. Had he reached through the orifice into a world constructed on a different set of space-time co-ordinates from our own? And pulled a case of Scotch out of it?

He gulped at the concept, but it would not go down—not as easily as the Scotch. But the Scotch was there. Where had it come from?

The thing, whatever it was, must be sus-

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ceptible to direct mental control. The children had found in it what they had wanted, and so had he.

Bates decided that he needed more data. What thing did he most want? A new car, say. If they had a decent car instead of their ancient jalopy, Martha would have been back from the sale at a reasonable hour to look after the children, and none of this would have happened. He stood up and looked into the peep-holes again.

The car was there, a sleek new convertible fresh off the assembly line. He touched it; it was real. Hanging by a wire from the door handle was a sheaf of papers. He turned them over and leafed through them —executed contract, bill of sale, registration certificate, everything. All were in his name, address correct, everything in order.

THIS was too big for him to lift out, but he could drive it out. Bates dropped to his hands and knees and crawled into the blackness.

It hurt. It hurt intolerably. It felt as if every muscle, tendon, nerve and bone were being stretched to the breaking point and beyond. And it went on hurting. It had been going on since the beginning of time, and it continued until time itself was worn out, a forgotten memory.

Bates was screaming, but he heard no sound. Here where time was not, sound could not be, nor anything but tearing pain, infinitely extended. Then he fell.

It was not a long drop, only a couple of feet or so, but he fell inertly and struck hard. Yet the stunning impact was a blessed relief after the ageless torture he had undergone. He lay still while long waves of peace washed successively over his torn nerves.

Presently he heard voices, and the voices made words, and the words made sense after a fashion.

"It is indisputably one from Sol Three. Observe the size, observe the clothing of animal hair."

"Yes, You are right; it is a Solar who has fallen into the anastomosis. Tandro has been careless about where he left it. Do you hear, Solar? Are you alive? Do you speak English?"

Bates rolled over on his side, propped himself on one elbow, and opened his eyes. He was in a vast roofed-in space, softly lit from some source far overhead. He had an impression of row after row of writing tables receding into the distance, each piled with books and papers and a small human form bent over each one, busily working. But most of the view was cut off by the bulk of the great machine beside which he lay.

It consisted essentially of four massive pylons facing each other from the opposite sides of a fifteen-foot square. Each pylon curved inward toward the center in an arc of ninety degrees, and each tapered from a massive base to a face of a yard square at the tip. The construction was of gleaming metal, whose planes and curves met at improbable angles.

A pulsing disembodied light played over the whole structure and was concentrated into four tight beams which rayed out from the facing surfaces of the pylons. In the center of the space, where the beams met, a cube of shimmering blackness hung suspended.

Bates was conscious of hands fumbling at his body. He looked up and saw that half a dozen little men were bending over him. They were of various ages, but all were small, less than five feet in height. They were uniformly clad in close-fitting garments of some soft, lustrous material and each wore an expression of polite interest and detached concern.

"You do speak English?" one of them repeated.

"Sure I do," Bates said. "Hey, wait! You speak English too! But you're not Americans. What is this, anyway? *Where* is this?"

"This is the Galactic Institute for Historiographical Research, subsection Sol."

"How did I get here? Where's the car? What are you doing speaking English, anyhow? Is this the Earth?" Bates was aware that his questions were as confused as his mind, but he saw no way to avoid that.

Another of the little men took up the conversation. "Earth? Oh, yes. That is Sol Three. No, this is very far from Earth. We speak many languages. All of us here are specialists in Sol Three, second octant. North America, I believe you say? Yes?

"English is a basic tool in our work. We speak it often among ourselves, for practise. There is no car here. You came through the anastomosis. Tandro should have been more careful about leaving it where people could get at it. His carelessness is perhaps understandable. Usually we work with a time differential of plus fifty. In that region there are far fewer people to interfere. This

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is the first time we have projected into the interbellum. It is necessary, however. So many records and sources no longer exist a few years farther on."

The implication of these statements only registered on Bates's mind at a later time. He was concerned now with a more immediate personal problem.

"Get me out of here!" he demanded. "Get me home."

"Certainly," replied the little man who had spoken first. "Norel, wheel up the ladder, please." The one addressed pushed a framework of tubular metal into position beside the black cube.

Bates's nerves shrieked. He leaped to his feet. "Wait a minute!" he cried. "Not that way!"

"There is no other way. And *why* not, if you please?"

BATES explained why not. The little man permitted himself a smile.

"I understand," he said. "Yes, it must be distressing. The difficulty is that you are mentally conditioned to the fixity of time, and the anastomosis is not powered sufficiently to transport a body of your mass in comfort.

"We are all rather smaller, you see. There is, unfortunately, no help for it. It is a limitation of the design. Why did you enter the anastomosis in the first place?"

"It was the car." Bates told them the story of the bubble gum, the balloons, the case of Scotch, the shiny new convertible.

The little man called Norel smiled. "Ah, yes. That is the radiant effect of the projection. We were aware of it of course, but have made no use of it. We are not acquisitive here, we are students."

"Radiant effect?"

"Well, yes, so to speak. Forgive me if my language is not clear. No doubt one of our technicians could explain the matter more properly. We merely use the anastomosis as a tool and, I fear, have paid little attention to the principles of its operation.

"However, it is essentially this—the projection is not single, but infinite. It exists not only in the spatio-temporal epoch, which you regard as real, but in all the other parallel conditional epochs, which are potential but not actual.

"I shall put the matter in lay language. The time-stream, you understand, is not linear but infinitely ramified. Each event determines along which branch of the time-stream successive events shall occur.

"Had a sufficient number of events in the past of your world been different, the space now occupied by the anastomosis in your garage would have contained—bubble gum, did you say? A curious word! Or whisky, or an automobile registered as of your ownership.

"The possibilities are infinite, since at every instant innumerable choices are being made among many alternatives, each of which determines a future along a different branch of the time-stream. The anastomosis appears on every conditionally possible branch and all branches are interconnected through it."

"But how could I see or touch anything which doesn't really exist?"

"Ah, but which branch of the time-stream is the one which actually exists? That is one of the basic problems of the Historiographical Institute. A difficult one, I may say. It involves not only hyperspace, but hypertime, you see."

"Wait a minute, then! Which branch am I going to come out on, if I *do* go back through that cosmic meat grinder?"

"Oh, you will go back to the one you came from," Norel replied placidly. "We always have—we think."

The little men advanced upon him. Bates struggled vainly. They were little men, but competent, and there were a lot of them. They carried him to the ladder and up the steps. They tossed him, as gently as possible, into the cube.

It was not generator trouble that had delayed Martha Bates this time, but the carburetor. Fortunately the engine had gasped out near a service station and an obliging motorist had shoved the car off the street for her.

Nothing serious, the attendant had said, but he was a long time putting it to rights and the price he asked was serious enough, if the trouble was not.

She was in a state of considerable annoyance when she was finally able to continue homeward and annoyance increased to alarm when she looked at her watch. She would never have left the kids alone with Steve if she had known it was going to be this long. Steve was a good husband and an affectionate father, but she was never entirely at ease about the children when she was not there to keep them under her eye. She hurried as much as she dared, wondering what had happened in her absence.

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TURNING into the alley than ran behind the Bates house, she had to brake sharply to avoid hitting a little old man who was walking in the same direction.

"Watch where you're going, you dope!" she muttered. The little man apparently did not hear. He stepped back and bowed. He was very short, she noticed, not over five feet tall, and dressed in soft glittery stuff that looked transparent but wasn't. She thought of a housecoat made of that material. He was carrying a large bundle of books and magazines.

The children were safe after all. They stood staring into the open door of the garage. She had to blow the horn to get them to move aside so that she could drive in. She braked again, suddenly, to avoid running into the huge square black thing that occupied the center of the floor. The clamor of her children's voices burst upon her ears.

"What goes on here?" she demanded, stepping out of the car.

"Pop's in the Nasty Moses!" shouted James. His eyes showed white all around, like fried eggs. His voice reflected a horrible mixture of glee and consternation.

"In *what!*" cried Martha.

James pointed to the black cube. "In there."

"Daddy went in the magic-box," Alice wailed. "Oh, Mamma, isn't he *ever* coming out again?" She began to sob.

"What is all this?" queried Martha helplessly.

"He just crawled in," James explained. "Like this." He dropped to his knees and started crawling. Martha shrieked and grabbed for him. She caught the seat of his pants and pulled him back before more than the top of his head had penetrated into nothingness. She hauled him to his feet and shook him.

"See here, young man," she ordered. "You tell me what this is all about!"

"Perhaps I can do that more easily," said a quiet voice in the doorway. Martha spun around. It was the little old man she had passed in the alley.

"Who are you?" she demanded.

"I am called Tandro. The spatio-temporal anastomosis is mine, you see." He advanced to the black cube and set down his bundle.

"Is that—that *thing* yours?" she cried. She seized his arm. "What have you done to my husband?"

"I have done nothing, Madam. I fear, however, that he is now at the Galactic Institute."

She tightened her grip. "You little beast," she said vehemently. "If anything's happened to Steve—"

Tandro smiled. "Oh no, Madam. There is no danger, I assure you. Norel and the others will see to that. Still, it was thoughtless of me to leave the anastomosis here among so many people. Another time I must be more careful. It is not only children and cats who are possessed of curiosity, I observe."

At this moment the body of Stephen Bates erupted from the cube, described a short arc through the air, and collapsed on the floor, groaning.

Martha released her hold on the little man, fell to her knees beside her husband, and lifted his head in her hands.

"Steve! Are you all right?"

Bates drew a deep breath and let out a shuddering sigh. Tandro touched the wrist of the prostrate form.

"Quite all right, I assure you," he said. "Perhaps a little distressed, but in no way harmed. I thank you for the use of your outbuilding. And I apologize for my thoughtless intrusion." He stepped to the cube and looked through the peep-holes.

"The anastomosis is also unharmed. I bid you goodbye." He picked up his bundle, stepped into the blackness and vanished. The cube flicked out like a light.

Bates groaned again and sat up. "Martha!" he cried. "It *is* Martha? You *are* real?" He felt to make sure, and sighed again. Martha sniffed.

"Steve Bates!" she exclaimed. "Have you been spending the afternoon drinking, and me worried to death with the car and the kids!" She looked around. Both children were regarding their father in wide-eyed wonder. "Get up out of this and come into the house!"

Bates complied. As they went to the house he staggered slightly, but it was not because of the whisky. Inside, Martha propelled him toward a sofa.

"You sit down there and tell me what all this means."

"Wait a minute," said Professor Bates. He went into his study and emerged in a moment with the handful of neatly-written sheets that had cost him most of the afternoon.

"Call it all a drunken dream if you like," he said. He ripped the sheets across, put the pieces together, tore them again, and cast them into the fireplace. "I wish it were!"

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(Conitnued from page 8)

in such tales—containing humor, drama, magic and provocative scientific problems. And, of course, your editor will be on hand with this department and his review of the amateur magazines.

ETHERGRAMS

THE mail department is bulging as it has been regularly of late—so thanks. We open with one of our long-time contributors, who still seems a little ill-at ease in the Sargelessness of space. And there are plenty more missives of various sorts and opinions to follow so—

OFF WE GO
by Chad Oliver

Dear Editor: We start with George O. Smith and *The Kingdom of the Blind.* Ummmm—interesting conversation, nice boy-girl relationship, fascinating idea . . and no novel. For some reason, known best to himself, Smith insists on planting only corn seeds in his fertile soil. Gad, will aliens never cease coveting our darling Sol? Who wants the Solar system anyhow, and what for?

Henry Kuttner, who is rapidly becoming a sort of idol to this reader, takes the cake, per usual, with *Dream's End.* I am awed—and to think that this is the man who used to write the Hollywood-on-the-Moon things for TWS!

Margaret St. Clair represents a much-needed trend away from the Captain Futures and down (or up?) to the common man. However, *Super Whost*—while better than its predecessor—is just transplanted soap opera. All it needs is a suave voice at the end, imploring along familiar lines:

"Girlies, wouldn't you like a super-swell apron, just like Oona wears? You bet you would! And all you have to do is answer the question *I wash my clothes in Petrarch's Chocolate Bars because. . . .*"

Okay, I see the little blue pencil.

The one writer that I have run across that would be perfect for the ideal that you seem to have set for STARTLING STORIES is Ray Bradbury. His characters are real and three-dimensional, his plots are simple and tasteful and his writing is magnificent. Can do?

You already know what I think of Bergey's cover, or should by this time. It is absolutely incompatible with the forward strides you are trying to take—not because of bad workmanship, but because of inexcusably bad taste. Just what sort of readers are you trying to get, anyhow—little green men with bulging eyes and a Freud complex?

In my opinion, what science fiction writing needs, more than anything else, is the development of sound, believable characterization. *Then,* when the author has established a recognizable human being, bring on the ideas *and show how the character reacts to it.* How, for instance, would the realizatiion that there are an infinity of inhabited worlds affect psychology here on Terra? I do not suggest an essay on the subject—simply have the characters act accordingly.

Upon which, I bid you adieu.—*1311 25th Street, Galveston, Texas.*

Okay, so it was no novel. And Rhinegallis *et cie* were not coveting the good old System but far more concerned with keeping it out of the short hair of their own. Or that's the way we got it anyway. . . .

If Oona and Jick ever go on the air you can have the job as announcer for our dough, Chad. What do you wash yours with anyway?

As for Bradbury, can do. He's been writing for us of late and will be appearing here and in TWS. So you don't like Bergey—doesn't that make you a bit trite?

You are so right about characterization coming first. We've been screaming for same for some years now, and not alone in stf. But all too often it seems to us that writers who have the human insight for sound characterization seem to lack any real ideas —mournfully vice versa.

We do the best we can with what we can get and shall continue to.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?
by L. Michael Gould

Dear Sir: A little while ago, as a result of a letter of mine printed in your companion magazine, THRILLING WONDER STORIES, I received the May edition of STARTLING STORIES, together with other magazines and letters from all over the world. This is the first SS that I have seen since the March, 1939, issue (which contained EandO Binder's THE IMPOSSIBLE WORLD).

I found the format generally improved and congrats for keeping up the HALL OF FAME reprints, for keeping a large space for letters and for NOT having any articles *(L. Michael must have loved our July issue with its OPERATION ASDEVLANT—Ed.).* The leading novel, the HALL OF FAME novelet were good, but COLUMBUS WAS A DOPE was rotten. The cover was good to look at but it didn't illustrate the story.

And now I'm going to do some time-travelling. Here we are in 1939. All the bookstalls carry brilliantly colored mags with the names EandO Binder, Jack Williamson, Manly Wade Wellman, Fred A. Kummer, Ed Earl Repp, Stanton A. Coblentz, Arthur J. Burks and, well, that's enough—across the covers. What has happened to those authors? Are they all dead or don't they write or what, now?—*Glenrose, Bagatelle, St. Saviours, Jersey, Channel Isles, England.*

Once again, L. Michael—glad you're back in touch after such a long drought where U.S. stf writing is concerned. Sorry you didn't like the Heinlein COLUMBUS.

As for the authors you mention, well, let's see—

Otto Binder is still writing (his brother has long since retired) but the bulk of his time is taken up by comic continuities. However, a short story of his, THE RING BONANZA, appeared in our July issue.

Jack Williamson is back in harness after a heavy dose of war work but his current contributions do not seem to be coming our way —and not because we haven't tried, either.

Manly Wellman is writing stf sporadically, but has gone on to considerable success in historical biography and the detective fiction field (you'll find his latest stf effort, a story based on Nostradamus, in a current TWS).

Fred Kummer is pretty well absorbed by radio writing, Ed Earl Repp is doing mostly

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westerns when not running his school for budding authors in Hollywood, Coblentz is still writing stf but is doing better as a poet and Arthur Burks has been in the Marine Corps as a major and is currently flirting with some sort of a job in Brazil.

So, the authors you inquire about are alive and developing all sorts of new talents. At any rate, that's the story.

GENE'S HIDE
by Gene A. Hyde

Dear Editor: First the stories: "The Kingdom of Blind" was excellent but tell me, was there or was there not an alien race? I love the way Smith threw theory around in that story. As I said before, very good. And now to the shorts.

In spite of the fact that Patti Bowling, Jim Kennedy and a few of the others couldn't quite figure out the last St. Clair yarn, I've decided to rate "Super Whost" at the top of the list. Darn it, I like St. Clair's style no matter what anyone else says. When I read one of her stories, I have the feeling that I'm reading the *Satevepost* several centuries from now. What did you think of this yarn, Kennedy? Or are you still not bothering to comment?

Kuttner ran a close second with "Dream's End", very good, and a very interesting idea to fool around with in your spare time. How do we know that our whole life isn't just a dream? To carry the idea a little farther, maybe when we die we are waking up from our dream?

The other shorts came in this order—"The Life Detour", "Proxy Planeteers", and the "Ring Bonanza". All of them fairly good and, on the whole, a very good issue.

I am indeed glad to see that the HoF stories are gradually improving. I'm looking forward to the day that one of them will rate at the top of the list.

I want to close this with an appeal. I moved recently and, in the process, I lost three of the letters I had received in answer to my invitation to argue. One of them was from Frederick Price, one was from a fellow in Antlers, Okla. (I have the address but not the name) and the third was written on a post card so I don't have the name or the address. If you three fellows will write to me again I'll promise to be more careful with your letters in the future.—*1807 North Madison, Peoria, Illinois.*

The whole idea of Smith's ending to KINGDOM OF THE BLIND was to leave the reader in a state of speculative screaming meemies. We thought he handled it very well indeed without committing himself. You have the right slant on St. Clair, for which, thanks.

As for speculation on Kuttner's story, you must know by now where you can wind up if you carry it too far. Remember, even a padded cell is still somewhat confining. Tough luck on losing the letters while moving. We once lost some 300 phono records that way, including most of the old Bix, Tram and L. Armstrong opera. Highly discouraging process.

AFTER HYDE'S HIDE
by L. L. Shepherd

Dear Sir: How about a little representation for the State of Illinois in The Ether Vibrates? According to the July issue, Gene A. Hyde, of Beardstown, Illinois, is the only Illinoisan to read Science Fiction or at least think enough of it to express themselves by letter.

I would like to point out that I have been reading Science Fiction for years and I am not considered too queer by the natives.

While I am on the subject; I will add that I think, *Thrilling Wonder Stories* and *Startling Stories* are the best of the field. I read them all and can't see any point in picking out individual stories, authors or artists to comment upon. I believe the Editor is much more competent to pass on such things. After all, we still buy them and I am sure the moment the circulation figures began to show that we didn't, he wouldn't need a fan letter to pick out the changes that need to be made. Or would you?

To go back to Mr. Hyde. He poins out to you the comment in Harper's Magazine. I would like to point out to him and the world in general, if it is worried about Science Fiction, that Science Fiction has arrived on a far greater scale than having comment passed upon it in Harper's Magazine. Science Fiction has been deemed worthy of two short stories and a two-part story in, The Saturday Evening Post and Colliers, no less, respectively.

I have had an idea buzzing around in my bonnet for some time, on a story about thought transference of material matter. I have read so many Science Fiction stories, over the years, I would probably be guilty of plagiarism right off the bat, so I want to ask you: Do you recall any stories on that line of thought?

I would also like to get on the mailing list of some of these "Fanzines". I read about them in your department but what are they?

I also have stacks and stacks of back numbers on all kinds of Science Fiction Mags. Does anyone want them?—*204 East Ryder Street, Litchfield, Illinois.*

Well, thanks, L. L. Shepherd—a highly encouraging epistle despite a certain confusion in the second-and-third person departments. It is our opinion that every humanly conceivable idea has been used in stf at least once. But—and here it is—no idea has ever been used to its ultimate development. So see what you can do with yours.

As to the fanzines, we hope you get on some of the mailing lists. They must be seen to be believed.

SHORTY
by E. O'Neill & F. Lincoln

Dear Vibrator: Just to show that all your readers aren't morons we liked St. Clair's SOMA RACKS and SUPER WHOST enough to recommend them to all our SF friends. Science fiction and fantasy stories need more refreshing humor of that type.—*176 18th Avenue, San Francisco, California.*

Oh, come now—we never said *all* our readers were morons. We never even thought it. But we do think you're so right about la St. Clair. You'll be reading more about Oona and Jick.

WHY SHE WANTA READ?
by Wanda Reid

Dear Editor: I agree with you—THE SOMA RACKS *was* a clever story. SUPER WHOST more so. Nuts to all who didn't get the point.

Glad to see Bergey on the cover, though it isn't as good as usual from him (I think he's the best cover artist of them all! There, I've said it and I'm glad!) I LOVE St. Clair. Congrats on a swell issue.—*540 East Market Street, Salinas, California.*

Congrats on your good taste (quiet there, Oliver) in liking both St. Clair and Bergey.

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We figured that it might take a little time for the St. Clair tales to get across (why do people have such violent negative reactions to anything new?), but they seemed to feel a real stf need for chatty, everyday-life yarns in the world of years to come.

ON THE SOMA RACK
by Janice M. Kennedy

Dear Editor: I hate to apologize but I am afraid that I am forced to. It seems that I misjudged my friend, Margaret St. Clair, a slight bit. Also I am late in commenting on the July issue (we'll skip the comment, Janice!).

SUPER WHOST was an excellent story. Maybe not exactly science fiction but an excellent crack at a good many unfortunates like myself who are incurable contest entrants. Mrs. St. Clair has a definitely sarcastic style that I like—a little futuristic humor, you might say (and then again, I might not—Ed.).

Best of all, this time she toned down the double-talk to where it was enjoyable, even if I am still in darkness as to exactly what a soma rack is.

Please have Mr. Barnes and Mr. Kuttner bring back my Pete Manx! And lastly, thanks for printing first effort but. sir, you cur, you cut my favorite parts out!—*900 West 36th Street, Los Angeles 7, California.*

Okay, Janice, we'll answer yours if you'll answer ours. A soma rack is a wire support designed to hold a soma bottle on the wall. And now, what in hades are your favorite parts? We'd like more Pete Manx too.

SUPER BOOST
by Lloyd Arthur Eshbach

Dear Editor: I don't often do this sort of thing—write fan mail, that is—but I think Margaret St. Clair deserves a boost for "Super Whost" in the current STARTLING. It's a nicely written yarn, just wacky enough to be entertaining. I mention this because I have a hunch there will be a difference of opinion on this story and I want to register a "pro" to combat a "con".

The issue as a whole looks good, though I've only read one other story—Binder's. Okay, though Otto has done better.

One of these days I'll have to write another s-f story and see what happens.—*P.O. Box #159, Reading, Pennsylvania.*

We're sharpening up our waste-basket already, Mr. Eshbach, and slathering at the rejection slip pad.

Seriously, thanks for the boost on SUPER WHOST and why not take a crack at another yarn? We'll give you all the help we can.

The best Oona and Jick is yet to come—the one in which Oona gets loose with a super calculator and all but throws the world into a sort of negative space.

THESE SCHOOLBOY PRANKSTERS!
by Jimmy Goldfrank

Dear Editor: Asdevlant!! Grrr! That's what should happen to Bergey. I take my copy of S.S. to school to read. It is in my desk. A girl goes into my desk, takes it out & shows it around. That wouldn't happen with a decent cover (morally of course).

The way I score: 0 pacs of WHOST is perfect.

Kingdom of the Blind	2½	pacs
Ring Bonanza	0	"
Life Detour	999	"
Dreams End	4	"
Proxy Planeteers	¾	"
Super Whost	"	"

Your Whoasting Whost or as they say in Sirius Italian: "You lika soma whost eh!.—*1116 Fulton St., Woodmere, N. Y.*

You just keep on going to school, Jimmy—and take care of little girls who snoop around your desk drawers.

ADDRESS WANTED
by A. L. Smyth

Dear Sir: In the last issue you mentioned the British Fantasy Review, but gave no address. I should like to have their address, as I am interested in obtaining a copy of this publication.—*135-44 77th Avenue, Flushing, N. Y.*

FANTASY REVIEW (British) is published bi-monthly at 15 Shere Road, Ilford, Essex, England. Single copies in USA cost 15c, six (or a year's subscription) 75c, both post free. Walter Gillings is editor and his associates include John Carnell, J. Michael Rosenblum, D. R. Smith, Arthur F. Hillman, Fred C. Brown, Nigel Lindsay and R. George Medhurst. American correspondents are David Kishi, 171 West End Avenue, New York 23, N. Y., and Forrest Ackerman of Los Angeles.

See the fanzine review of this issue for a more detailed account of FANTASY REVIEW.

IT CAN SO!
by Arthur H. Rapp

Dear Editor: It can't be true! It *can't!* You mean your readers prefer your policy of printing those nice little, dry little innocuous missives, of which the July TEV is a sample, instead of those juicy, rip-roaring, adjective be-sprinkled invectives, innuendoes and nameless verbal DT's which were so fascinating a part of the wartime SS?

Look at the G. C. Brown letter you used as a "horrible" example in the Fall '46 TWS. Look at Lin Carter's "exception" in the July SS. Great Ghus and Little Foos, what is a letter column without stuff in them? (Those?) (They?)

Why, it's getting so that I read the stories before I tackle the departments!

Pome

Sgt. Saturn, sad to state,
Though steeped in BEM's and Xeno,
Left SS to a horrid fate,
Descending monthly, we know.
(Now there's really a rhyme for ya!)

Where is the famed SS of yore
Which nothing good did lack?
We want poems, puns and gore!
Please, Ed., bring it back!—*2120 Bay Street, Saginaw, Michigan.*

Oh, well, he asked for it. So zip up tightly, everyone, here we go—

To those reactionary birds
Who'd chain us, double-talked, in slavery
We feed a diet of staid words
In their sub-basement aviary.

(Now there's a rhyme too, Brother Rapp)

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He who would break his fast on puns
Although he's surely apt to flounder
Needs not to carp long as he shuns
The sole-less hacks on whom he'll founder.

Which should settle Herr Rapp's bouillabaise.

CLEMENTS-Y
by Jack Clements

Dear Ed.: No fancy introductions, just my own little comment on the July ish.

"Kingdom of the Blind" was one of the most interesting stories that you've ever printed, and certainly highest in scientific value. I especially liked the variations of psychological theories. F'r instance the idea that a parinoid might question his sanity periodically to prove to himself that he is sane is quite clever.

"The Life Detour" was a cleverly worked out little piece, and I was glad to see it reprinted. Keller is always welcome, so please have more of his stories in this department, as he is missed from the stfield.

Kuttner's yarn wasn't bad, but certainly he is capable of better stuff. I'll bet it was an oldie.

Glad to see Otto Binder back, even tho his story wasn't in keeping with the "new policy". Had a few new ideas, tho. Writing was good.

"Super Whost" was super. I see that the kids blasted her last story, but I'll bet the more mature (mentally) readers got a kick out of it. Tho this story wasn't as good as the first one by her, it was still excellent. I liked the writing. I get a kick out of the way she pictures the world of tomorrow as scientifically super, but unchanged psychologically. The little undertones which she manages to slip in on various social conditions are handled artfully. Please have more of her in the future.

Couldn't get beyond the first sentence in Hamilton's yarn. Sorry.

The Tev is way below par this time. No Kennedy (JOE), Sneary, Oliver, Jewett or ennybody, except one good letter by Telis Streiff. That's my boy. Tev used to be the stomping ground of all these boys, but it seems they've been disgusted as of late. Disgusted, I imagine, because SS has improved so greatly in the past few months, and has at the same time let its readers page drop so considerably. Seems the Ed. doesn't know the difference between humor and hack. When the Ed. cut out that sickening space lingo tripe, he also barred real humor from the page, tho he won't admit it. In order to remedy this, you'll have to stop that cutting, and stop printing those short letter ratings, such as the Wigodsky horrors. I mean it Ed.—*6310 Madison Rd., Cincinnati 27, Ohio.*

Well, space lingo had to go—we got to talking it in our sleep. As for your pet letter-hacks—Oliver and Jewett are present. JoKe has taken on a lot of other interests and has time for only an occasional missive. Streiff was never a regular in the sense the others you mention were and are. Don't know what's happened to Sneary this time, but we wish he were present and have never cut much of his gorgeous prose.

Until we started running these letters off, we had no idea that Margaret St. Clair had won such a following. For which, cheers—and here is Jewett.

TO WIT JEWETT
by Tom Jewett

Dear Ed.: . . . . So after he sees the cover pic on the July Startling he ses, i got a book that is even better, only it aint as thick as that. And i say, if

[Turn page]

LOOK
FOR SMART MEN

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you're selling what i think you're selling it dont GOT to be as thick!

The Inside Story, the cover ses, and its only after i give him two dollars do i learn that it was written by a resident of Sing Sing!

Seriously, it's the best semi-dressed girl that friend Bergey has ever painted. Virile-looking male, too. Aside from the fact that no green hands appeared in the lead story, the cover is very good!

George O. Smith's heh heh novel is good, and merits binding with other first rate stories. Georgie rambled around in places, but the overall story was excellent.

I liked very much Otto Binder's Ring Bonanza. Very well-written, and i really felt sorry for Homer when that slob took his gold and glad when he finally got rich. And it looks like Brother Jack's artwork, too. Zat so?

Keller's The Life Detour smelled. I dont see what he had to offer that fans rave about.

The article moderately interesting. Do we see a trend trending here?

Kuttner's Dream's End was terrible. Proxy Planeteers good, especially the science and the Proxies. St. Clair's Super Whost awful. Oona and Jick! Say it fast and it sounds like right after you eat a radish. Let's give these two characters the air. They need it.

Pics: best was the—Binder?—on page 57. Very good! Next was the double-page Stevens spread. You cant get around it, his pen work is wonderful! Other two Stevens' good. Remaining odd pics punk.

Hammond's new novel should weather the storm of criticism, and i will send you a copy of my weather-twists. Fact is, i will send a copy of the FAPArag, which should put and end to stories with FAPArag with this messy missive. Also postcard for any comments.—*670 George, Clyde, Ohio.*

You'll get your comments in the Fanzine Review and like it—'em—it. The so-and-so has us doing it too. The page 57 illustration has a Vincent Napoli look to us. A bushel of giant radishes (sharp too) to you for your St. Clair beef. Finally, who wants to get around Stevens' pen work?

SLICING THE MULLEN
by Stanley Mullen

Dear Editor: In my opinion, Kuttner is the brightest star appearing in current magazines—under whatever name he chooses to write.

Your magazines offer a rich diet of Kuttner, which should be a boon to your circulation figures.

Your other authors run pretty much to a standard—with the one exception of a new one, Margaret St. Clair, whose feeble attempts at cleverness are not very funny. However, I dislike being unkind—even about her—and she may work out, with a lot more apprenticeship.—*4936 Grove Street, Denver 11, Colorado.*

Well, that's it—a matter of opinion. You're welcome to yours, Mr. Mullen and we reserve the right of not sharing same. Incidentally, thanks for the personal enclosures and good luck with your fanzine, GORGON, which is a fine job to date.

PRODIGY FROM SAN ANTONE
by Michael Wigodsky (age 11)

Dear Sir: The July issue of STARTLING was fine, except for the novel, THE KINGDOM OF THE BLIND, a hackneyed job which suffered from a tired plot, unintelligible pseudoscience, a vague conception of "aliens" and a sickly ending.

Welcome back, Eando-Otto. Your story, THE RING BONANZA, reminds me of O. Henry.

THE LIFE DETOUR is better than the usual HoF story.

DREAM'S END reminds me that I've been wanting to sound off about Kuttner for a long time. He writes much too often (about two short stories and a novel under various pseudonyms a month, I should say). As a result, while he sometimes turns out a classic such as THE DARK WORLD or LANDS OF THE EARTHQUAKE, the general results are low considering what he could do if he wrote less often.

PROXY PLANETEERS is an average Hamilton, not quite hack and not quite first-rate.

Yo-ho-ho and roasted bollo! Margaret St. Clair is back! Whee (not apple)!

Bergey's improving! Inside illi are terrible.

THE ETHER VIBRATED interestingly. Thanks for the writeup.— *306 Evans Avenue, San Antonio, Texas.*

Well, you see—oh, heck, no comment on this one.

CATCHING ON
by John Van Couvering

Dear Editor: Good deal! A George O. Smith story! I am happily reading it . . . I turn a page . . . read down to the bottom . . . up to the top of the next page . . . nice pic there . . . hmmmm, wasn't it Stevens who was illustrating KINGDOM OF THE BLIND? Something wrong here. EGAD! This is another story! But what happened to KOTB?

I read the ending again . . . I go back halfway and read to the ending again . . . I go back to the first and read the whole story again . . . In desperation I go down and buy another July SS, begin at the cover, read everything including the ads and TEV . . . still no juice. Sargie, all I have to say is, WELLLL . . .? Was he or wasn't he? I mean, was he really a paraphrenic or a schizonoid or something?

Darn that man, he ends his stories so infuriatingly logically . . . and so durn uneventfully! Show him the dictionary, Tungsten, ole sock, right there in the "c's".

"Climax (kli-maks)—n. (lit.) The main point of a story, the kick (slang), the consumating summary and height of action usually placed as the most exciting part." See, George? Now, get in there and show 'em you can do it if you want to.

Rest of the mag: LIFE DETOUR was swell. Where do you take these classics from, old thing? Really fine.

That RING BANANA or whatever it was was crude. Ignorant, to be more precise. But, despite a rather hacky plot, it warn't too awful. Although it was the worst in this ish, in any one of the war issues it would have been one of the best. DREAM'S END was too psychiatric for me. That angle is getting rather overworked. SUPER WHOST was tricky. I'm catching on to Oona and Jick now. First story awfully obscure, but now it's beginning to pick up and look around. Moah, Ah say. Ole World Wrecker, as usual, comes up with a fine old yarn. PROXY PLANETEERS was superior.—*902 North and Downey Avenue, Downey, California.*

Okay, John, so you didn't get the point of the ending of GOS' novel. Well, that was the point. The reader, being presumably a normal human unaffected by Lawson's Radiation, never could be certain as to whether the hero were sane or not. The snark was a boojum, you see . . . or don't you? And so what?

For the rest, we're sending you a bunch of Florida bonanzas in a SUPER WHOST wrapper with schizophrenic trimmings. Why split the atom when you can do the same so much more easily to your own personality?

THE ENDLESS KENNEDYS
by Casey Kennedy

Dear Editor: Lay that Scotch bottle down boy, an' gaze at a real BEM. 'Tis Kennedy number four (Casey

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with the big bat that I would like to bust over your head). I'm here of course, about the July SS which Whost (subtle ain't I) pretty ghud on the whole. The cover, which illustrated "Kingdom of the Blind" nearly knocked me blind when I first saw it. BEM's again, huh! Oh well, it's a change anyway. But leave us get on to the stories. Yeah, the stories!

KINGDOM OF THE BLIND . . . Smith. 98% Outside of "The Star of Life" this is the story of the year. Wonderful!

DREAM'S END . . . 87% Swell!! Hank did a beautiful job on this one. I nominate this for the STF hall of fame. It's the best short I've seen this year.

PROXY PLANETERS . . . 60% Pretty good Edmond, but howzabout a Cap Future soon. We haven't had one in a long time.

SUPER WHOST . . . Margaret St. Clair. 60% also. It is rare that we get good funny stories. Very good. The others were mediocre to put it mildly.

Now ed, heh, heh, heh! Now I got another Idea. If you will remember way back to the days of Xeno, then you will recall the pictures we used to draw of ye sarge & Co. So my idea is that we draw some pictures of the Ed and you publish 'em in TEV as in the days of yore. Howzabout it, huh!

Before I close off, I wish to extend greetings to Janice K. O.K., Greetings. Ghudbye for now, folks.—*425 East 86th Street, New York 28, N. Y.*

Fresh, isn't he? So he wants pictures of the current editor. He capitalizes Xeno and puts the sarge in lower case. Could be he's got something—but what? Not much, whatever it is. Draw us at your peril. Be warned.

GLAD TO SEE US
by Guerry Brown

Dear Ed: It is nice to see STARTLING out again. Since your elimination of the dear old-er-er—what COULD you call it?—well, anyway, since IT'S departure, things have looked up quite a bit. In reading material as well as in editorial comments and such. SS and TES have greatly bettered in reading matter. We're getting less and less of the old hack space opera, and more and more intelligently written stf with real point to it. The present issue is a case in point. As before, I'll use the null system for rating.

THE KINGDOM OF THE BIND: *½. A very interesting story. Taken from a novel viewpoint, too. Although we still have a one-man saviour of the Solar System, it's a little more plausible than the kind of "world-savers" you often run across in Startling. A good story!

THE RING BONANZA: *** An average little story, nothing special. Glad to see Binder, tho.

THE LIFE DETOUR: *** An interesting idea, but the story was poorly worked out. The thing didn't seem too plausible.

DREAM'S END: * Best story in the issue, and I'll recommend it for one of the best printed in SS this year. GHu! He dreamed that he dreamed that he dreamed that he dreamed that he—this should be a warning to all experimenters with human minds.

PROXY PLANTEERS: ** A very good little story that was marred by a rather vapid ending. The scene where the two scientists got drunk and then started the pile to work to suit them was hilarious. But the ending was corny. It might have been a good start for a long novel but it was poor for a short story.

SUPER WHOST: How long is this Whost business going to go on? First thing you know, it'll be sold in the stores. Altho that might not be too bad. Say, by the way, did you hear about the ghost that lived on Ghost Whosties and evaporated milk? (You probably hadn't and if you have, you've wished that you didn't. (Somehow, that doesn't look right!) Give it ** for being a nice humerous short. Tho it's just an everyday story with stf trimmings.

THE HOT AIR BLOWS: How disappointing, that there was no letter of mine, this issue. First, a word anent your comments about the theoretical ammonia-breathing BEMS on Jupiter. Us humans breath air to get oxygen. We breathe oxygen in, and breathe carbon dioxide (CO_2) out. We *burn* the oxygen in our body cells. It combines with the carbon in the

[*Turn page*]

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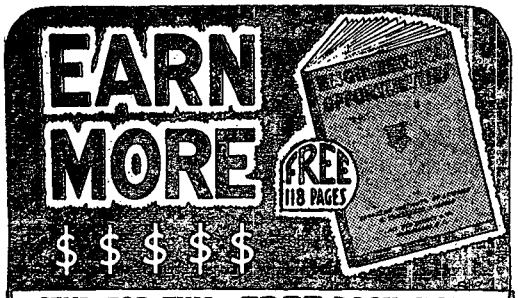

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sugar in our bloodstream to make CO_2 (the carbon and oxygen combined.) Now I do not know that ammonia can be burned. I'm no authority (yes, I admit it) on chemistry, and if some guy that knows about it can contradict me, then let him. Now that little reaction is the basis of all life on Earth (all animal life, that is.) See why people would write in and say that ammonia-breathing things would be pretty much impossible. Of course, we don't know. No one has ever been to Jupiter, yet.

As for the letters, I agree with Grimes on wanting more spaceships. I disagree with his dislike for fantasy in a stf mag. Gwen's letter was OK, ditto Rosemary (does she have a last name?) What do you know, a letter from K. Martin Carlson. Very nice to see him in here. Also glad to see my correspondent, Norm Storer. Ditto green giraffe Striff. de la Ree was interesting. Also Burgess.

Janice Kennedy! You like "Tubby" stories! Blasemphy! John Walsh WAS succinct. Glad you let my good chum Lin Carter's missive in. Hyde's letter was just SKIN and bones.—*P.O. Box No. 1467, Delray Beach, Florida.*

If Rosemary has a last name, she didn't choose to give it to us. We'll omit that CO_2 business of yours and concentrate of the Ghost Whosties, now that we've heard about them. The favorable reaction to the St. Clair series is, as we have said before, a most pleasant surprise.

Her everyday life in the future idea is definitely something new in stf—at least from her blithe, housewifely point of view. We're anxiously awaiting more Jick and Oona yarns from the talented St. Clair typewriter. We don't want to run out of material for this series.

WHO WAS GORDON GILES?
by Gordon Hopwood

Dear Editor: After eleven years as a science fiction fan (minus a three year tour with the U.S. Army) I have finally decided to write an ethergram.

In spite of Soma Racks and Super Whost S.S. and T.W.S. are the best in the field in this reader's opinion.

July issue rating:

(a) "The Kingdom of the Blind" more by Smith please.
(b) "Dreams End"; very good for a short.
(c) "Proxy Planeteers"; good, but not up to par for for the dean of S.F. writers.
(d) "The Ring Bonanza"; fair.
(e) "The Life Detour"; I have better ideas for the H. of F.
(f) "Super Whost"; Oh well, it had a clever ending.

Glad to see Otto Binder back, what ever became of Gorden Giles and Jack Williamson?

In the brickbat department let me enter a plea for covers with space scenes or scenes of other planets instead of the gaudy and sensational things that Bergey and Belarski put out.

How about a novel by Otto Binder, or an old EandO Binder masterpiece in the H. of F.?—*Glendale 1, California.*

Well, so you're anti-St. Clair. You'll have to admit she's a darned good balance for the thud 'n blunder of the others, however.

As for Gordon Giles, he was Otto Binder, who plans to write us a novel if he can find

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the time. Jack Williamson, as already mentioned, is writing but for other markets. Glad you like us in our current form. Thanks, Gordon.

CARTER GO BRAGH!
by Lin Carter

Dear Ed: I had to look twice at the name to be sure I had the right mag. That cover was the best Bergey's done for quite awhile. Swell coloring . . . and . . . b'gosh! he's revolutioned the cover design! No screaming babe in a tin bra and scanties—just a slightly shell-shocked wench in a torn red . . . er . . . *dress* no brawny muscle-man in a red football suit with a technicolored doughnut gun—just a nervous looking Joe in an old blue serge no sneering BEM—just a couple of green claws clutching through the light disc. Gad—Bergey the non-comformist!

THE KINGDOM OF THE BLIND was excellent, tho not *quite* as good as Kuttner's epic last issue. I must confess I don't get the title. Elucidate, pliz. The plot was clearly first rate. The idea of a secret interplanetary underground organization has often intrigued me. It was done up right good here. The frustration that Carroll would naturally meet was depicted cleverly. I must confess, tho that after putting the story down I'm not quite sure whether it *was* hallucination or not. Shux . . . and me with my I. Q. of 350, too.

One is favorably impressed at the rather imposing list of names on the contents page: Binder, Keller, Kuttner and Hamilton. Kuttner's short was the best—a quietly horrible li'l thing. Veddy good. Hamilton's short was excellent—he always has a clever twist to his yarns. Binder was a refreshing treat—howsabout getting him away from the comics long enough to do a novel for us, one of these days? Kellar's Klassic was a flop. Unconvincing, unrealistic and uninteresting. Who nominates these things to the Hall of Fame, anyway? He should drop dead. SUPER WHOST was

[*Turn page*]

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humorous and refreshing. Let's have a couple of dozen sequels to this. Very funny. Very.

THE ETHER QUIVERS wasn't anything exceptional. My Li'l Gem didn't help matters, either. I noticed a lot of fen wondering what happened to Kennedy. Apparently you fellers haven't heard Joe has quit actifanning. His reasons seem to be college, and that too much of one thing (stef, in this instance) is bad for a person. It's really a loss to Fandom. Joe was one of the most active fans and a swell guy, to boot.—*865 20th Ave. So., St. Petersburg 6, Florida.*

Better bury your I.Q., Lin, if you're planning to continue following stf. Glad you liked the issue, however, in spite of the slaps at our HofF and TEV.

SOME PRONOUNCE IT....
by A. B. Krueger

Dear Sir: Unaccustomed as I am, may I add my bit to the cracks and comments your readers hand you?

I have been a reader of scientifiction since it's inception in magazine form by Hugo Gernsback. (I guess that dates me fairly well as to years.) I read all that I can find and, as I live in the hills back of Santa Cruz, I often miss an issue so can not always get just what the readers complain of, as I have not read the story myself. As the readers' comments are what I turn to first, out of sheer curiousity on others' viewpoints, I am often amused by their kicks. I would mostly hit the nail squarely.

I am still wondering if Gwen Cunningham has found out how the cover ladies keep their—uh—clothes on. The wired bra might be the answer, or possibly it is just paint.

After reading the July issue and studying the cover, which is supposed to illustrate an important moment in "The Kingdom of the Blind"; I wonder why your artists don't stick to the script?

I especially enjoy your H of F and have read most of them before, but still find them good.

My only comment on your stories is that they do not come fast enough. Let's go monthly. HUH? Wel-l-l, I LIKE 'EM.—*Route 2, Box No. 618-B, Santa Cruz, California.*

A nice letter, Mr. Krueger (who is listed as a consulting engineer specializing in heating, ventilating, air conditioning, layout and design). Your criticism of the July cover is reasonable—but the covers must be decorative rather than exact, which is why they frequently contain errata spotted by those who like to dig out such trivia.

We'll be seeing you monthly anyway since both magazines are bi-monthly and come out alternately.

THE DAM HAS BURSTED
by Billie Lee Randolph

Dear Ed: I'm going to start a controversy. What's wrong with Marchinoi? I think he's pretty good. I like Bergey, too. All letters answered, no matter how insulting. All the art work was good this July ish. All the letters are interesting—the views and personal opinions fascinate me.

And now to tell the truth about the stories. They were as usual, some good, some bad.

1) THE KINGDOM OF THE BLIND—George O. Smith. I really like that guy.

2) PROXY PLANETEERS—Edmond Hamilton. The only thing wrong was the length. It needed to be longer.

3) SUPER WHOST—St. Clair. Give us more of these humorous things. I like the style. (Another argument in the making).

4) THE LIFE DETOUR—Keller. Fully deserved the HofF.

7) (I skip here because there is plenty of room for

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improvement.) THE RING BONANZA—Binder. He needs more practise.

11) (more room) DREAM'S END—Kuttner. This is a disappointment. I usually like him a lot better.

It was a nice surprise to see that article. Give us more off and on, but please, please, don't, don't make a regular habit of it. The review of the zines keeps me pleasantly occupied.—*Rainbow Cafe, Buchanan Dam, Texas.*

Okay, Billie, so don't worry about our making the OPERATION ASDEVIANT sort of thing regular. We don't get enough of them to do that. When we do and think it interesting, we'll run one.

You've really asked for it with Marchioni, I fear . . . and Bergey. The two of them are pet clay pigeons for the critical fraternity.

VIRGINIAFEN
by Tommy Carter

Dear Editor: A good friend of mine and S-F enthusiast, Leslie Hudson, and I have recently been deploring the lack of fan activity in Virginia. So we thought we'd see what could be done about it, the first step being to ask all S-F readers in Va., to get in touch with us.

We don't know what'll develop along a club line exactly, but it ought to be a lot of fun for everybody. Leslie and I are both crazy about S-F, and we'd like very much to work out something. So anybody interested please write Leslie at Roseland, Virginia (which is all the address he has) or myself. All letters will be answered—promptly even!

I really do think we can have something worthwhile if we get a good response; so all you S-F fans in Va., write! Incidentally, I'd welcome all suggestions or comments from non-Virginia fans who have the time or urge to offer any. Many thanks to our former-Sarge for running this announcement; tis greatly appreciated, I can assure you!

I enjoyed the "Dark World" considerably, but I haven't read any other issues since "Red Sun of Danger", have been instead saving them to read during this summer vacation.

By the way, glad to see you using G. O. Smith, who is a darn fine writer. Wish you'd straighten me out on something though. You've been using illustrations by some one you call either L. Sterne Stevens or Verne S. Stevens, claiming one is the son of the other; now those pictures look like the work of one Lawrence, but I suppose that's a pen-name of one or the other aforementioned artists. But what is the name, L. Sterne or Verne S., of the illustrator you use? I agree with everybody else in that he is as good in his own particular style as is Finlay in his. If the above sounds confused, it merely reflects my own state of mind. . . .

I like the new-style reader column, not because it is less zany, but because things seem on a much friendlier level. More pleasant that way. . . . Incidentally, what makes the column so funny are the shafts of real wit flung so ruthlessly by the Sarge and most of the fans are pretty good too!

Particularly Kennedy and Oliver, who are dropping fandom in favor of college. Great pity, too—*817 Starling Avenue, Martinsville, Virginia.*

Best of luck to your embryonic fan group, Tommy. We hope reprinting word of your and Leslie Hudson's hopes will result in some fast activity. Come to think of it, there have been few evidences of fanactivity in Virginia to date. Let's hope it's there and merely been lying in wait for a couple of enterprising souls like yourselves.

You should have gorged yourself on SS novels by this time—let's hope the diet proved digestible—but with STAR OF LIFE, THE LAWS OF CHANCE, LANDS OF THE

[*Turn page*]

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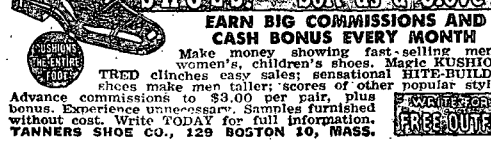

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Your illustrator pal is Verne S. Stevens (also Lawrence), father of L. Sterne Stevens. Does that help? He's mighty fine. Glad you like the letter column as it is today—but don't count JoKE and Oliver dead yet. After all, Chad is currently represented and JoKe comes out of his cave occasionally to pen us a missive. Let's hear from you and Hudson.

NO RAGE FROM ANGER
by R. R. Anger

Dear Editor: The answer to the question "How Improved Can You Get?" seems to be finally and completely answered in the July *Startling*. Ghu, how did you do it! *Elle est magnifique!* The lead novel is wonderful, way better than the May one. The illustrations are great, even Ye Ed is funnier and better in every way in TEX. The cover—Oh, Oh! Ghu! How can you pick between them!

In May we have Rosalind Russell clad in a Man's gym outfit two sizes too small for her and firing a gun that looks for all the world as if it was cast out of a solid piece of lead. She is, of course, not affected by the temperature of space and some mysterious wind (in space, mind you!) is blowing her hair out behind.

In July we have an unusual study: Hedy Lamar is apparently being taught to jump through a paper hoop and register fear at the same time by a worried director. We see that the man is an important executive because on his desk are the two essentials of an important executive—a telephone and a giant economy size bottle of bicarbonate of soda.

The director is looking worried because he does not think the Hayes Office will allow Hedy's costume and because he thinks he must have been using too much of that stuff that comes in a bottle (not bicarbonate of soda) because he thinks he sees a pair of grisly green-hands badly in need of a manicure (it's surprising how many people with green hands always need a manicure, sin't it?) holding Miss Lamar.

Poor fellow, he doesn't know that he's just part of a Bergey Blotch and that he can't expect things to be normal. He should stop worrying and be thankful Bergey didn't decide to make him jump out of a spaceship in his red flannels like on the Jan. ish!

Every story this issue was swell. You simply can't beat this standard.

1. The Kingdom of the Blind . . . George O. Smith is probably capable of more involved thinking than any other stf author. In this story he displays his seemingly unlimited ability to carry on serveral distinct and individually complicated plots and viewpoints at once. The whole story from the title on in is presented from two totally different viewpoints—no small feat, considering the subtlety and intricateness of the main plot. The reader sees the events of the story from the eyes of James Forrest Carroll as a gripping adventure with his one life and that of the rest of the world as the stakes. He sees the alien people and their aims, civilization and characters from close reality. At the same time the whole story is presented from the viewpoint of Dr. Pollard, the psycho. From this point of view the story becomes a complicated and interesting study in psychology with the fate of the world hanging in the balance to give everything an aura of tenseness that never lets up. As if this was not enough, the author refuses absolutely to take sides in the matter and so the reader is left with the feeling that he has read two distinct stories, each of which was full of drama, wonderful characterization, suspense and just about every possible ingredient of a great story.

2. Dream's End . . . A story which achieves the same effect as some of the best time-travel-paradox stories.

3. The Ring Bonanza . . . Otto Binder is certainly a great author on his own. Did he write Son of the Stars alone or was that a collaboration. It was published as by EandO.

4. Super Whost . . . Lifelike, ordinary home life of the future. Never really tried before in stf and very well done.

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5. Proxy Planeters . . . Original ideas and Hamilton writing.

6. The Life Detour . . . Gives a strange feeling of alienness even though the story was about humans on Earth. This is doubtless just what Dr. Keller wanted.

A very, very wonderful issue, Sarge. Thanks a lot.
—*520 Highland Ave., Ottawa, Ont., Canada.*

Well, you vented your spleen on poor Bergey, all right, all right. We rather liked that cover, green talons and all. After all, if they did lay eggs, they needed claws of some kind to scratch with. No, Bergy didn't lay the egg on this one.

For the rest, we'll try to keep up the standard.

VIRGIL SINGS
by Virgil Utter

Dear Editor: The July issue was superb to say the very least. To begin with, Smith's story is his best to date and if he'd only spent a little more time in preparing his characterizations it would be on a par with the newer Kuttner masterpieces. As it is, it will no doubt be a Hall of Fame classic in one of the issues ten or twenty years from now.

It's indeed a pleasure to welcome Binder back to the fold; he's written many fine stories but none of them surpasses the punch of *The Ring Bonanza*. Accent on human nature and discovery, that's the fare I *like!* Try to get him back as often as possible.

Dream's End was typical of H.K.'s recent stuff. It packs more of a wallop than all other stories in the issue combined. Lord! it's enough to make you doubt your own sanity. So far as I'm concerned, Kuttner is the new Merritt, Saki and Dunsany rolled into one, and he deserves all the credit anyone can give him for not prostituting his fine skill by turning out continual hack.

Speaking of hack, how did Hamilton's mess get in the issue?

The Life Detour, not representative at all of the fine stories of ages past, had a good idea behind it—a fine theme—but it was overshadowed by the juvenile viewpoint utilized throughout. I have a remedy for all those poor Hall of Fames which you've been letting out of the family closet.

Why not get hold of some of the truly great yarns published in the other stf mags of yesteryear? You've reprinted all the best ones at your own direct disposal, why not admit it?

Super Whost still does not give Miss St. Clair the reputation you heralded would be hers. I fail to get excited over her stories. Now, if you were printing a magazine exclusively for the distaff trade, it would probably go over big but, as you're not, let's let the whole thing drop.

Am glad you saw fit to print the article on Sub warfare. It takes top honors among the features, of course. Let's see a lot more articles along the same lines. How about one by Willy Ley?

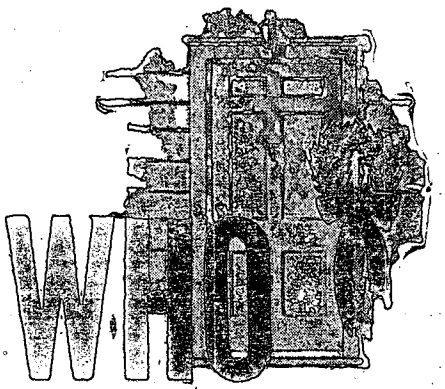
As for the art department—well, when the Sarge got his discharge I had found hopes that Bergey and Belarski would get the same rush act. But it isn't so. Not only is Bergey still going strong but he's doing worse than ever. Mind you, his art and color sense are fine, but why don't you give the guy some decent subject matter.

Instead of well-rounded females being gripped by insinuated BEMs, let him do a pic on some less gaudy aspect of the stories. Other magazines do it and, with your new policy, I should think you would also. There have been so many complaints on this matter of late, that I think a poll is in order.

Question: to have Bergey paint voluptuous females on every cover, or let him have a chance at some other kind of subject. Resolved: no more BEMs and no more terrified femmes.

As for the rest of the illustrations—they're swell, except for Marchioni and he would get by if he returned to his old style.—*Milner Hotel, 117—4th St., San Francisco 3, California.*

[*Turn page*]



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Well, we'll skip the laudatory comments and deal only with the gripes, Virgil. Your beef about the Keller yarn is understandable. It did have a juvenile slant. But so did just about every other of the so-called old-classics. Witness the Skylark series of Dr. E. E. Smith and others recently revived. For every John Taine or Stanley Weinbaum, you'll find a million juveniles by the now-revered "masters" of early stf. They weren't classics—they were, for the most part, mere primitives of quaint interest but low intellectual appeal. They got by because they were early in the field.

Our HofF quality will be on the way up from no on for a number of reasons not currently to be divulged.

IT CAN'T BE!

by Jordan Green

Dear Ed: I have just finished reading the July issue of Startling Stories. It is 80 above here today, but the bim on the cover makes me feel cold. Why, oh why, does Bergey insist on the semi-nudes? Doesn't he know how to draw a gel with clothes on. Shame on you, Bergey! TSK. TSK.

Kingdom of The Blind: Smith. A truly startling story and one that is not beyond the realm of reality. No one, as yet, really *knows* what is waiting out there in space for mankind to run across. I *liked* that story!

The Ring Bonanza: Binder. I did *not* like this story. The plot is so, old it is mossy. I've read stories with that identical plot in them in Westerns for years. Mark up a dud for Binder in this issue.

The Life Detour: Keller. Somewhat on the same order with a new twist. Not bad at all.

I think Keller can do better.

Dreams End: Kuttner. ?? ?? ?? No Comment.

Proxy Planeteers and Super-Whost—Haven't read 'em yet. Don't like shorts, anyway. The Ether Vibrates: I do not agree with Millard Grimes as to his opinion on the stories but I certainly do agree with him on keeping Fantasy out of Stf mags. Fantasy will turn the best STF mag into a 'Spook Rag'. Fantasy has no business in SS or TWS.

So you wish some one would explain what "W-C" stands for Re: Raj Rehm SHH!! I'll tell you! It stands for "Without Glee." I have a copy of it. Does anyone know what has happened to Raj Rehm?

Stellarite and WG are both good but I like Stellarite the best.

Thanks for a good issue.—*1139 East 44th Street, Chicago 15, Illinois.*

Jordan Green—he's in the wrong issue—we mean the wrong magazine. Jordan Green was the out-of-this-world Kilroy of George O. Smith's QUEST TO CENTAURUS in the April issue of THRILLING WONDER STORIES. How come he's turned up here? We'll let Smith puzzle it out, especially since Green seems to go for his stuff.

Don't know what's happened to Raj Rehm of late, Perhaps the Fanzine Review will give

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us a clue. Eighty degrees in the shade and he doesn't like shorts. Meinheer Green must be out of this world at that!

KONCLUSION BY....
Jim Kennedy

Dear Editor: After finishing the July issue of S.S. I can come to only one conclusion. Something's wrong, for once it was a pretty good issue.

The cover was the usual Bergey style. The colors were a little too many and too loud, but nevertheless it was pretty good, except for the green hands. There was no mention of them in the story so why have them on the cover?

"The Kingdom Of The Blind" was by far the best story in the book. It's one of these stories that has the reader wondering all through it. I still don't know if there really were aliens or if they were just in Carroll's mind.

"Ring Bonanza" by Otto Binder take second place. It wasn't until I read The Ether Vibrates that I found out that the author was the famous EandO Binder. It was one of his best stories and I hope we hear more from him in the future.

"Proxy Planeteers" and "The Life Detour" are just about tied for third place.

Although Miss St. Clair's "Super Whost" wasn't among the best in the book, it was much better than her "Soma Racks."

Last of all came "Dream's End." All I have to say on this is that Henry Kuttner can do better than this.

And Lo and Behold! What do I find in The Ether Vibrates but another Kennedy. It's getting so that there are so many of them it's hard to keep track of them all. So I'm sending out a call to all you fans who answer to the name of Kennedy: If you would kindly get in touch with me, we might be able to form a club of some sort. "The Kennedy Scientifiction Fan Club" or some other name of that sort might be appropriate. I will be glad to answer all letters.

And speaking of clubs, I wish somebody in California would get in touch with me as to how I could join one of the stf. clubs in Calif. Or maybe I could start another one (I feel in an ambitious mood) Of course I'd need a little cooperation, so how about those letters.—c/o *Route No. 1, Box 148-G, San Luis Obispo, California.*

Why do all these Kennedys need a club—to hit us over the head? Haven't they done enough damage already? We leave to you readers—Kennedys excepted.

And this mops us up for another round of slugging it out with you dear dear readers—you lucky people, you. Not much poetry this time out—which may or may not be a bad thing.

All in all, an interesting department to manage. Keep it up and so long.

—THE EDITOR.

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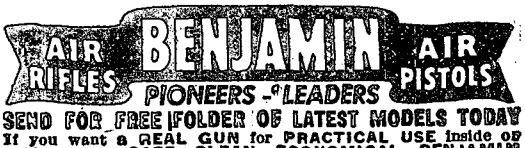
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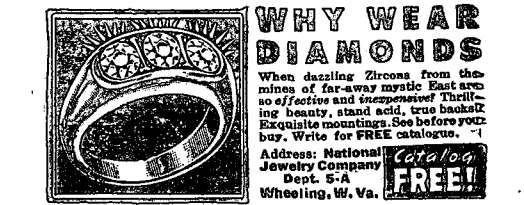
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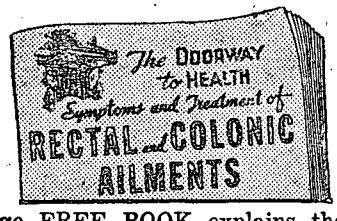

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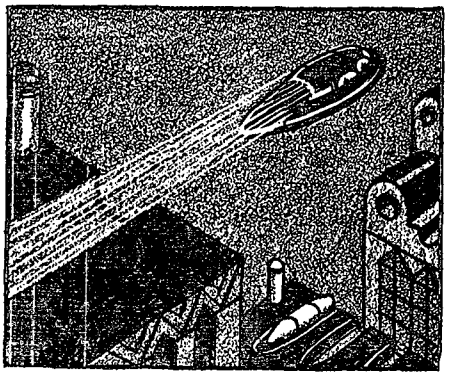
REVIEW OF THE SCIENCE FICTION FAN PUBLICATIONS

A NUMBER of items of interest loom on the docket before we get down to the blood, sweat and you-know-what of playing hammer guy in the actual process of dissection known in certain circles as reviews of science fiction fanzines. First in importance, it seems to us, is the arrival of the first copy that we have seen of an English professional stf magazine. We were not sent



the first issue, but the second, which arrived courtesy of David Kishi, merits attention.

Entitled FANTASY and edited by Walter Gillings, who seems to be the bellwether of the current British science fiction postwar revival, it is a slickpaper job, about three-quarters the size of this and other American stf publications in format. And, despite its title, it is far from being a fantasy magazine in the accepted sense of the word.

The lead novelet, RELIC, by Eric Russell, is a tale of an abandoned alien space-ship infested with invisible vampires, a time warp, radioactive stunts, a robot and a Lemurian tie-in. Except for mutation it seems to contain just about all the themes with which American stf authors have been toying for many years.

Other fiction, while competent, has the same prolificity of theme—which gives us the idea that the British authors, after their long wartime starvation, are glutting themselves with expression of long-pent theories. But they are, for the most part, well written

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and more than passably entertaining. They'll be catching up with the Transatlantic parade shortly.

Articles, one on space-ships by Gillings, the other on certain newly-discovered facts about Northern Lights by Thomas Sheridan, are up-to-date and interesting if not in sensational vein, which is quite all right with us. Features seem to be of standard level.

All in all, this is a sound science fiction rather than a fantasy magazine and certainly one which deserves a high place in the field. We wish Mr. Gillings and his myrmidons every success.

The PEN-INK Publishing Company, 130 West 42nd Street, New York 18, N. Y., announces a new and authoritative volume called ROCKETRY, by Constantin Paul Lent, engineer, industrial designer and inventor as well as Vice-President of the American Rocket Society during 1944. The title apparently tells the story, which may be of interest to rocketophiles as well as would-be space pilots.

Other items worthy of mention are an announcement by Jimmy Taurasi that FANTASY-TIMES, due to other preoccupations on the part of its publisher, will hereafter be published monthly. Ten pages larger, it will cost 10c per issue, 25c for three and a dollar per year.

And D. A. MacInnes, of 877 North Third Street, Memphis, Tennessee, has sent us a card announcing a new fanzine, NECROMANCER, which has yet to arrive. This too (when, as and if. . . .) will be a 10c job and should have arrived by the time this column sees print.

With which the business before us is wound up and we can get down to the hard and dirty work. The round-up of fanzines this issue is a good bit larger and more interesting than it was the last time—for which, praise Allah. So let's at it, the A-list first as always.

FANTASY ADVERTISER, 628 South Bixel Street, Los Angeles 14, California. Editor, Gus Willmorth. No price listed.

In small format with an excellent Cockroft cover, this is a soundly conceived and needed job, well executed. Its 32 pages include not only just about every type of stfads and swap offers, but are enlivened by Willmorth's editorial, plugging the Philcon, an article on fantasy in Stevenson, Kipling and Conrad by Paul Skeeters, and a brief itemized review section on new books of interest to stfans. Circulation, according to Willmorth, is an amazing 1,000 copies. Selah!

[*Turn page*]

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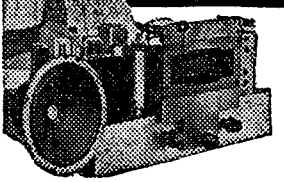

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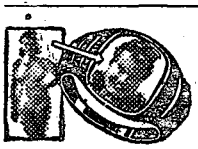

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FANTASY ASPECTS, 584 East Monroe Street, Little Falls, New York. Editor, listed only as NFFF sponsorship. Published quarterly. 5c per copy for NFFF members, 15c for others.

A compilation of the "best" in fanzine stories, this newcomer is essentially a reprint mag. Opening issue features stories by F. T. Laney, E. Hoffman Price, B. Gaulin, Ken Krueger, J. Nitka and J. Riggs. If the unnamed editors can maintain such a standard they should do very well.

FANTASY COMMENTATOR, 19 East 235th Street, New York 66, N. Y. Editor, Dr. A. Langley Searles. Published quarterly. 25c per copy, five issues $1.00.

Sam Moskowitz tees off on British fandom in the seventh installment of his prodigious fenhistory to good effect. Dr. Keller comes up with a brief memoir of his long stf career, Thryril Ladd investigates slick magazine interest in stf subjects and other departments are soundly documented in a rather more lively-than-usual issue of this most scholarly of fanzines—enlivened as well this time with an amusing two-page picture feature drawn by Joseph Krucher. Almost alive.

FANTASY REVIEW, 15 Shere Road, Ilford, Essex, England. Editor, Walter Gillings. Published bi-monthly. Price (for Americans) 15c per copy, six copies 75c.

Second issue of the first good British postwar fanzine. The editors and contributors are still goggle-eyed over the wartime progress of stf writing, pro and amateur, in the U.S. An interesting article on Arthur C. Clarke, British author-scientist, is spotlighted in a welter of gossip, reviews, obits and biographical notices. This is a good live job, indicative of a real renaissance in the British Isles.

SPACE TRAILS, 123 Edna Place, Buffalo 8, N. Y. Editor, Ken Krueger. Published quarterly. 15c per copy.

A neatly put out pocket-sized little job on slick paper, which features repinting of a single prozine story—in this issue, PRISON PLANET, by Wilson (Bob) Tucker—and a biographical sketch of the author. Jack Wiedenbeck cover a very good job. It should do well.

SHANGRI L'AFFAIRES, 637½ South Bixel Street, Los Angeles 14, California. Editor, Charles Burbee. Published irregularly. 10c per copy, 3 copies 25c, 6 copies 50c.

Full of hades as ever, the Angeleno have given this issue, #36, added spice by an Ashley-Laney feud as to the extent of degeneracy among LASFS fans. Cheer up—it's all in fun, if not exactly clean fun, and the rest of the mag is larded with the usual gossip, LASFS meeting reports by Tigrina and a daffy fantasy or two. Them LASFSers and their feuds!

SOUTHERN FANDOM, Ripley, Tennessee. Editor, Lionel Inman. Published irregularly. 10c per copy.

Under a subhead exhorting secession from "Yankee fandom" Messrs. Inman, Splawn and Knighton have cut loose with a light-toned and highly amusing new 'zine of songs, dances and wittty (?) sayings by themselves, Joe Kennedy and Ray Karden. Good fun.

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STELLARITE, 4 Winship Avenue, San Anselmo, California. Editor, John Cockroft. Published irregularly. 10c per copy.

If anyone wants to know what became of Raj Rehm, he is present in force (story and pics) in this somewhat whacky job, aloong with Jim Love, Redd Roggs and the editor (Cockroft, that is). Almost all fanfiction, with a somewhat juvenile slant toward parody, it rates the A-list mostly on newness and effort. You know—A-list for effort.

THE GORGON, 4936 Grove Street, Denver 11, Colorado. Editor, Stanley Mullen. Published bi-monthly. 15c per copy. 4 copies 50c. 6 copies 75c.

Second issue of a very professional piece of work, which seems at least to uphold the standard of its first, if not improve it. Featuring splendid artwork by Editor Mullen and Roy Hunt, this is a highly adult 'zine, featuring an intriguing study of stf in Chinese literature by Marijane Nuttall, a couple of first-class pieces of writing by Editor Mullen, an amusing poem by Mike Castle, a book review by Ackerman, Denver fangossip by R. C. Peterson and other well-contrived items. One of the best, if not the best fanzines now printed.

THE STAR, Box #7046 Station G, Los Angeles 37, California. Editor, Walter Graham. Published bi-ennially. Price unlisted.

A real heavyweight, evidently intended as a medium in which real scientists can meet and exchange ideas. This should be a bonanza for fans of a true scientific bent. It is to be run by subscription and, ultimately intended as a quarterly if sufficient contributions prove forthcoming. A HISTORY OF THE FUTURE, by William R. Rennagel, is to be featured in the next issue.

VAMPIRE, 84 Baker Avenue, Dover, New Jersey. Editor, Joe Kennedy. Final issue. Price 20c.

JoKe's final appearance in the fanzine field—which is to be lamented as Vamp has been one of the leaders. But maybe he'll be impelled to do a Bernhardt and make some more farewell appearances. We hope so, as he has rounded up an all-star cast for his swan song, including Joe Krucher, Gerry de la Ree, Bob Tucker, George Ebey, Gene Hunter, Walter Coslet, Don Wilson, Ackerman, Harold Cheney, Jim Breckenridge, Walter Kessel, Briggs and Rotsler. If you haven't seen a copy, latch onto one somehow.

All in all an excellent A-list, although the turnover seems to be frightful. But if some of the better newcomers manage to stick, the loss of such standbys as ACOLYTE,

[*Turn page*]

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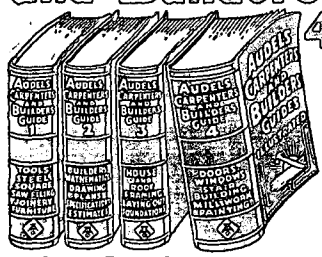

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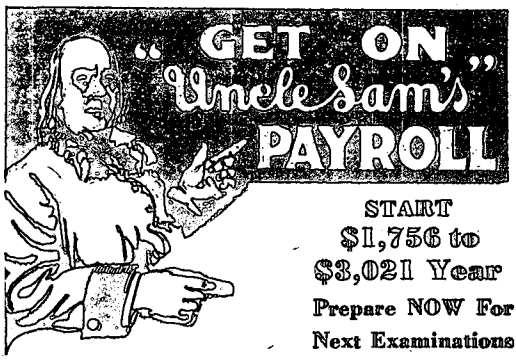

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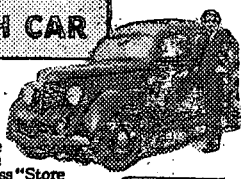

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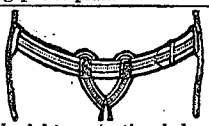

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And now for the B-list.

BURBLINGS, 637½ South Bixel Street, Los Angeles 14, California. Editor, Charles Burbee. What Burbee has in mind in this apparent one-shot we don't pretend to know, as it seems highly topical and local. Save for brief editorial note, all four pages are occupied with a peroration directed at Al Ashley.

FANTASY TIMES, 101-02 Northern Boulevard, Corona, New York. Editor, James Taurasi. Hereafter published monthly. 10c per copy. 3 copies 25c. Best of the current news-zines now that FANEWS is dogged by misfortune and appearing seldom. Breezy, factual, argumentative and up-to-date. Well worth the new price.

FAPARITION, 670 George Street, Clyde, Ohio. Editor, Tom Jewett. Published irregularly. No price listed. Eight pages of Jewett sounding off—which can be prettty amusing if you go for Jewett. Next please. . .

GLOM, Box #6151 Metro Station, Los Angeles 55, California. Editor, Forrest J. Ackerman. Published monthly. 5c per copy. Abetted by Robert C. Ruark, Matt Weinstock, Jonne Evans, Carroll Wymack and Bob Heinlein, the Ack cuts loose at all and sundry in his own inimitable way. It's good to see this once prodigious fan publisher and current literary agent back in the field.

PORTLAND SCIENCE-FANTASY SOCIETY NEWS BULLETIN, 3435 Northeast 38th Avenue, Portland 13, Oregon. Editor, Don Day. Published irregularly. Price unlisted. Indication of fanactivity upsurge in the

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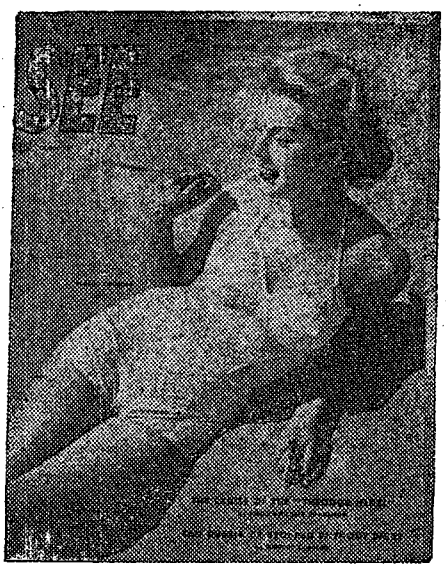

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great Northwest, this is a highly localized job. Let's hope it stirs things up in its district.

PHILADELPHIA SCIENCE FANTASY SOCIETY NEWS, 1366 East Columbia Avenue, Philadelphia 25, Pennsylvania. Editors, R. A. Madle and J. Agnew. Published bi-weekly. 5c per copy. 6 copies 25c. Brought into wider prominence by the Philcon, this highly efficient news-zine of Philactivities has been winning new readers.

SPACEWARP, 2120 Bay Street, Saginaw, Michigan. Editor, Arthur H. Rapp. Published monthly. 10c per copy. An amateur printing job keeps this one off the A-list despite such able contributors as Wilkie Connor, Marie Larson, Edwin Sigler, Ben Singer and Bob Stein. Pretty hard to read.

SPARX, 75 Sparks Street, Cambridge 38, Massachusetts. Editor, Henry M. Spellman III. Published irregularly. 5c per copy. Third issue of a very amateur job indeed.

THE FANEWS, 1443 Fourth Avenue South, Fargo, North Dakota. Editor, Walter Dunkelberger. Published irregularly. 2c per sheet, 55 for $1.00. We are sorry to learn that family illnesses have plagued the indefatiguable Dunk and cut down his fanapplication recently. But it's good to have this granddaddy of all the news-zines still in the field. Hope things clear up —and fast, Dunk.

THE ROCKET NEWS LETTER, 91 Pine Street, Riverside, Illinois. Editors, Wayne Proell and George Whittington. Publication date and price unlisted. The official bulletin of the Chicago Rocket Society, after an opening page of society news, is packed with more heavyweight rocket information (formulae and the like) than even Willy Ley could shake a Roman candle at. Too heavy for us!

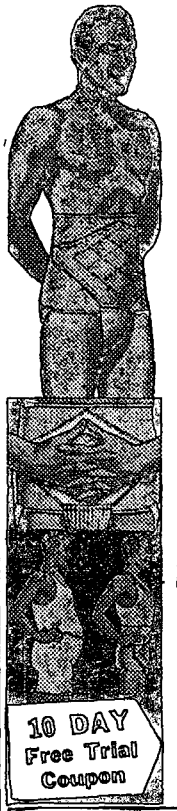
TIME TRAVEL TALES (first three issue), 428 Main Street, El Segundo, California. Editor, Rex Ward. Published irregularly. 7c per copy. 4 for 25c. A new one which may well make the A-list if a promised change of policy comes through. Ward is clever enough to rate it if he gets things going.

TWO THOUSAND A.D., 428 Main Street, El Segundo, California. Editor, Rex Ward. Published quarterly or bi-monthly. 10c per copy. 3 for 25c. 15 for $1.00. Another Ward opus which just misses A-rating, thanks mostly to sloppy appearance. Blaine Desmond, Arnold Wyatt, Joe Kennedy and the editor enliven a hopeful issue. Luck!

TYMPANY, 2215 Benjamin Street, Northeast, Minneapolis 18, Minnesota. Editors, R. L. Stein & Redd Boggs. Published bi-weekly. 5c per copy, 6 for 25c. 13 for 50c. Good live news-zine stuff, if the boys can keep up their early pace.

Well, that does it—and the B-list wasn't so bad either, by some miracle. Let's see some of you jump up to the A-bracket. As you master amateur publication techniques you ought to be able to lift the entire field. Hop to it.

—THE EDITOR.



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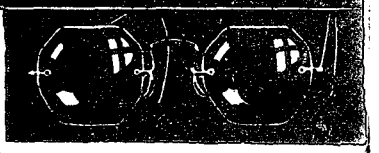

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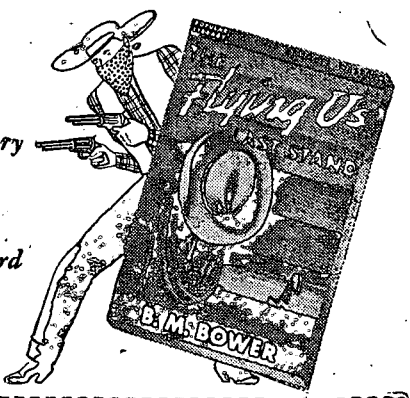

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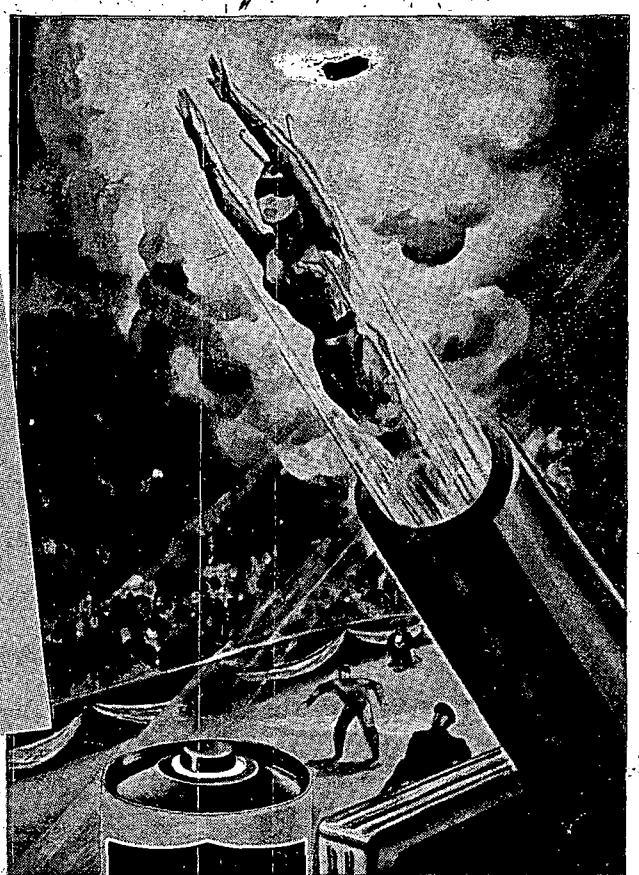

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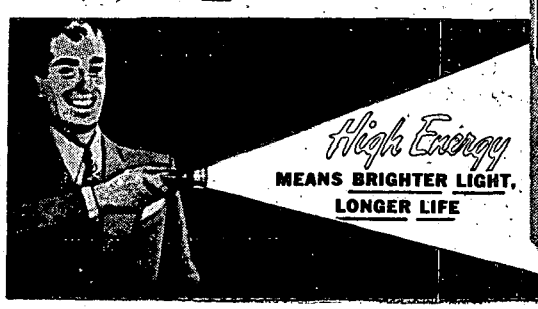

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